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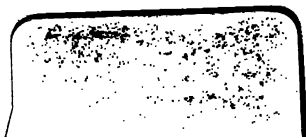
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MONEY'S WORTH.

MONEY'S WORTH.

A Novel,

IN A PROLOGUE AND THREE BOOKS.

BY TOM HOOD,

AUTHOR OF "A GOLDEN HEART," "A LOST LINK," "CAPTAIN
MASTERS'S CHILDREN," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
TINSLEY, BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET,
STRAND, W.C.

1870.

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250. y. 82

WYMAN AND SONS,
GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS,
LONDON, W.C.

DEDICATION.

TO MY WIFE,

WHO HAS SHARED THE ANXIETIES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS,

AS WELL AS THE PLEASURES AND SUCCESSES,

OF MY CAREER.

TOM HOOD.

PENG, 1870.

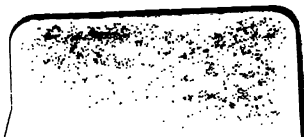
PREFACE.

It is, I hope, unnecessary for me to apologise for making the hero of my novel one of my own craft; if, indeed, I am qualified to call it so, by my very humble service in the ranks of journalism. But it has often struck me that the typical Writer met with in fiction has been a being nobody ever met with in real life, and that he consequently gave people very erroneous impressions. I have, therefore, in this story endeavoured, to the best of my ability, to give a plain and unexaggerated picture of the struggles of a young beginner in the *métier*, hoping it may prove not uninteresting to the reader even though it be not sensational.

T. H.



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MONEY'S WORTH.

CHAPTER I.

“THE YEWS.”

“THE YEWS” was—nay is still, for the present tenant has but changed its name—a fine old-fashioned house, within a stone’s throw of the “George Canning,” at Brixton.

Everybody, of course, knows Brixton, a suburb which, like many others in South London, retains, I know not why, a pleasant provincialism. It may be the river for all I know, but there is something peculiar which preserves the provincial features there within a shorter distance from the heart of the City than you will find in other directions.

Please to observe, I use the word “provincial” in its honest, original, pleasant sense—not in the sense to which it has been wrested by writers who preach “sweetness and light” with so much acidity and obscurity.

The provincialism of Brixton consists in the broad roads, the wide foot-paths, and the good gardens in front of the houses, rarely turned

into long, flat-leaded shops by the spirit of modern progress. The houses, too, have evidently been built in times before progress required the "running-up" which best describes the mode whereby modern edifices are erected.

I am bound, however, to admit that these features which distinguish the main arteries of the suburbs, are a little lost sight of if you turn aside into the more recently-built feeders of the chief channels. In those byways there are doubtless villas that rock in a high gale like a billy-boy at anchor, front gardens that a full-sized radish would be uncomfortable in, foot-paths that will not take one perambulator abreast—you meet three abreast on the wider walks of the leading thoroughfares,—and roads too narrow to allow the greengrocer's cart to pass the baker's truck without considerable manœuvring.

Nevertheless, the most prominent features of the district are expressive of a pleasant provincialism, as I have said. There is no evidence of the overcrowding which in some spots converts the front gardens into sites for building, and renders every foot of ground so valuable that all a householder can boast beyond the four walls of his dwelling are a

scraper in front and a dust-bin at back. The grass in the gardens, moreover, is green instead of brown; and the trees are not stunted and dwarfed by the overshadowing of endless brick. Another indication that relieves the mind of the oppressive idea of overcrowding is the paving of the pathways, which are not flagged all across, but have a sufficiently broad walk of stone, flanked by plentiful gravel on either side.

Look, too, at the inns along the main thoroughfares. They are not flaring gin-palaces, but old taverns, with a sign-post and horse-trough, and a wide space in front, pleasantly suggestive of the old coaching days, when the four steaming nags drew up there, and the fresh horses, that stood waiting, pricked up their ears at the distant sound of the horn. One pictures to oneself the bustle of the change, and the crowding of the passengers into the cheery little bar to stretch their legs and take a glass of something comforting; the driver always his glass of ale, old ale—like the wise man he was, knowing that brandy-and-water, hot, was but a fleeting support compared with it.

It was near one of these old inns that “The Yews” stood. The “George Canning” is a

corner house, and it boasts, above and beyond the attractions of horse-trough and sign-post, the artistic grace of a statue on a pedestal.

It is a queer old weather-beaten statue, I admit. It used to be a sore puzzle to me, when in the days of my ignorance I supposed it to be the counterfeit presentment of the great statesman whose name the house bears. A man, it is said, is honoured by a public statue as a punishment for his faults—at least, to judge from the result of such an honour,—but I never could discover what sins George Canning had committed that he should be exposed to public gaze in a table-cloth and a turban.

But that was in the days of my ignorance. Enlightenment came at last, when I made up my mind all of a sudden to seek a solution of my bewilderment at the bar itself. Ordering a glass of—well, liquid refreshment, I inquired of the smiling damsel behind the bar who it was that was immortalized in the sculpture outside.

She looked at me with a kindly pity that was too obviously mingled with a surprise nearly related to contempt, and said, “Oh, that is Diogenes, the Philosopher!” It was evident that she felt I ought to have “seen him about” so often that I should not have asked so foolish a question. I never have met him about, but

I had a preconceived notion of him which did not recognize the bold Roman nose of the effigy. Taking my stand on that nose, I felt tempted to retaliate: so I inquired if the house had been called the “George Canning” because of the statue. I received an answer which implied that the house had been called the “George Canning” in times long antecedent to Diogenes. I was, I may say, quenched completely, when a handsome old lady, engaged in some of the knitting, knotting, or netting mysteries of female fancy-work, seeing an inquiring mind going astray, came forward to its aid. “It was bought at the sale of the Cumberland Gardens,” she observed; and I felt immediately that the Cumberland Gardens and their sale were matters of history, to confess an ignorance of which would only hurl me to lower depths of contempt than my want of acquaintance with Diogenes, the Philosopher. So I only murmured, “Indeed, how interesting!” and vanished into the night.

But it is time that I quitted the neighbourhood of “The Yews” for the house itself.

It was called “The Yews” for the unusual reason that there were two yew-trees on the lawn in front. As a rule, “The Beeches,” or “The Firs,” or “The Elms,” is so styled for the *lucus*—I should say lucid reason, that there

is neither beech, fir, nor elm on the premises—at any rate, existing as a tree.

“The Yews” was a handsome old house, with a pleasant walled garden about it. On either side of the big gates, in lieu of heraldic supporters in the shape of griffins or eagles, two monstrous things like pine-apples “ramped,” if one may use a heraldic term—and one ought to do so, for the house had a grand ancestral air about it, somehow.

There was a broad gravel sweep around the two ancient yews, and there was a coach-house with stabling for eight horses. The back garden was terraced and laid out after the Italian model. But at the time when I must introduce my readers to it, the stables were empty, and the garden was a wilderness.

The truth was, Aunt Chippin—I give her the name by which she will be known henceforth in these pages—could not afford to keep up the house. Then, why, you ask, did she take such a house? Well, the fact is, that the house took her, and I will tell you how.

When Aunt Chippin was a young girl—it was some years before my story begins—her charms had turned the head of young Bresketh. Nor was Aunt Chippin disinclined to change her name—I should say no one would be

who happened to own it. So she and young Bresketh were engaged; but as young Bresketh was the second son of the junior partner in the brewing firm of Bush, Husher, and Bresketh, there were pecuniary reasons why the marriage should not come off immediately. The engagement went on for years, and by a curious fatality the partners in the firm went off in the same period. A time, in short, arrived when young Bresketh found himself his father's sole partner in the prospering business. Alas! he found that Aunt Chippin, unlike the firm's beer, had not improved with age; while he still considered himself a young man—an opinion which no sensible young marriageable woman would have dreamt of combating by a hint even.

Alas, for the wickedness of man! Young Bresketh did not marry Aunt Chippin. Worse! He married somebody else. But Aunt Chippin, if by this time she had worn out the romance of youth, had acquired the business-like qualities of—at least—middle age. The Bresketh honeymoon was clouded by a letter from a firm of lawyers, stating that their client, Miss Chippin, intended to carry her outraged feelings into a court of justice, and seek compensation at the hands of an intelligent jury of her countrymen.

Bresketh was desirous of avoiding an *es-*

clandre, so he compromised matters. He paid a kind of commuted damages, and he allowed the forsaken to live rent-free (so long as she continued single) in the mansion of which she once hoped to be mistress. The fact was that his desertion of the lovely Chippin was too well known in the neighbourhood of "The Yews," and he could not have lived there himself; so the concession was not so great as it seemed, especially as he went to live at the West End.

Aunt Chippin invested her honest earnings in an annuity, moved into "The Yews," and lived very happily ever after, as the story-books say. As time went on, and with its ceaseless ebb and flow took away old inhabitants and brought new ones, the story of Aunt Chippin and young Bresketh was forgotten, and by degrees the old lady came to be looked on as an eccentric old millionaire, who chose to let her house and grounds go to rack and ruin. Indeed by some she was connected with the ruinous houses in Stamford Street; by all she was supposed to be very wealthy. Aunt Chippin had a sister, who like Aunt Chippin had not been blessed with riches in hard cash. But she had married, and married happily, and she was blessed with two girls whom she considered treasures untold.

I hope none of my readers will question my statement that she married happily, because I must now tell them that her husband was a poor man—a professional man—a doctor, in short. He did what, thanks to the justice of Heaven, doctors seldom do—he brought home a fever from some of his poor patients—a fever of which he and his wife died, leaving the girls, then quite young, with no friend in the world but Aunt Chippin.

Aunt Chippin did for them all that she could do. She asked them to come and share with her her home, which was too large, and her income—which was *not* too large. They had no choice but to come, and they grew up from children to women under the grim shadow of “The Yews.”

Their education was a brief one, for Aunt Chippin had to remove them from “Backboard House, an Establishment for Young Ladies,” as soon as she thought they had had a sufficient start to get on by themselves. They were therefore to a certain extent self-educated—that is to say, they developed themselves as their tastes and characters inclined them.

Laura Mardale, the eldest, had a great deal of the hard sense and business tact of Aunt Chippin. She was some years older than her

sister, and had seen with clearer eyes and a maturer understanding the pecuniary difficulties which beset her father and mother. When she contrasted their struggles with Aunt Chippin's comparative luxury, and when she heard Aunt Chippin's history from the old lady herself, glad enough to get some one to whom to tell it, she grew harder and more practical day by day. She saw that Aunt Chippin had nothing to leave them, and that at her death they must turn into the world—beggars! The only thing, therefore, to be desired was money, and for a woman the only way of obtaining it was by marriage.

Mary Mardale had only seen that her father and mother loved each other and were happy in that love. Their little artifices to conceal their fight for bread had imposed on her simple and confiding nature. Aunt Chippin did not care to tell her story to her younger niece, of whom she spoke as "a dear girl, but a good-natured fool;" and I am not, I grieve to say, profoundly convinced that she was wrong.

The two girls were as unlike as brothers and sisters generally are. Laura was dark, grave, yet full of latent fury. Mary was fair, comfortable, sentimental, and lymphatic. Nevertheless, they agreed pretty well—they could

not do otherwise, in fact, for it takes two to make a quarrel, and Mary had not the requisite materials in her composition to supply steel for Laura's flint.

When the girls grew up, Aunt Chippin—not, I fancy, without some suggestions from Laura—thought it would be right that they should see society a little. But by her retired life she had lost all hold on society, and it was not easy to regain her footing there. However, by some means she managed to furbish up some acquaintances, and gave and received invitations. Unfortunately, the class of people which met Aunt Chippin halfway in this matter was not the best class. They had heard of her being rich and eccentric, and they were influenced accordingly to encourage her attempts to get the girls out. They were—to use an expressive bit of slang, so old that it is almost respectable—"no great shakes" themselves. But this Aunt Chippin, from her long isolation, was not fitted to discover. The result was that she and her nieces were surrounded by questionable people and adventurers—and it was from among these that the girls were to choose husbands.

This, then, is the position, if you please—an old lady reported to be wealthy, with two

nieces, her only relatives, and with a shoal of sharks around, ready to snap up the prey.

Laura was safe enough, you will say. She was bent on marrying for money. But Mary, who believed in the romance of true love, was in peril.

I can hardly say which seems to me in most danger. But each has a suitor, so I will introduce the pair to you, and you shall judge for yourselves.

CHAPTER II.

CUPID IN CORDUROYES.

Not very far from "The Yews," at a magnificent villa styled "Claytersville" in gold letters on the jambs of the gate, dwelt a Mr. Clayter. He was what is described as an independent gentleman—that is to say, he was not one of the many whose exodus from Brixton in the morning left that pleasant suburb with scarcely any male population until about six in the evening.

Claytersville was exquisitely furnished. Its grounds were laid out with taste, and its hot-houses and greenhouses were the envy of the neighbourhood. The dinners which he gave at times to a select few were simply perfect. He must have had, said some of his grateful guests behind his back, very intimate relations with "the sender of cooks" to have secured the services of such a *chef de cuisine* as appointed his table at these gatherings. His wines were above suspicion and beyond price.

People at times asked themselves why he lived so quietly in a retired suburb, but they did not trouble their heads much for an answer, so long as they got an occasional invitation to share the hospitality of the mysterious Clayter.

Clayter was a lady's man. He dangled. I don't know any word that will better describe the way in which a man of his age makes himself agreeable and attentive to the fair sex. He was too old to talk the ordinary nonsense of flirtation or to quote poetry, so he had to hang about over the dear creatures, and fetch and carry for them generally. It was a blessed thing for him that croquet was not invented in his time, or, of a certainty, his grey hairs (they *were* grey under the blue) would have been brought down to the lawn, and he would have gone spooning and doddering round the hoops at the hest of some imperious fair.

Not that the fair were particularly imperious. Many of them were in love with Claytersville, and would have accepted its owner with the other fixtures. He was supposed to be a bachelor, but this was not strictly true; he was in reality a widower—a trifling distinction, to be sure, to those who merely meditated taking him as if he had been the hall table, or

the sideboard, or any other piece of Claytersville furniture, second-hand.

Clayter was very like those articles in one respect—with a difference. The sideboard was of Wardour Street manufacture, made to look ancient, whereas Clayter was made up to look as young as possible, though it is difficult to suppose that the attempt imposed on any one except himself, and even that exception seems incredible. His hair was dark blue instead of grey, and his whiskers were similarly dyed and painfully curled. His teeth were false, to a grinder, and his cheeks wore a faint raddling of youthful bloom that had an objectionable habit of crumbling into his crow's-feet, and other corrugations of complexion. He dressed as youthfully as possible, but with a certain good taste; for, despite all his foibles, old Clayter was a gentleman. If he had not been he would not have made the one mistake—or, should I say, mistake number one?—of his life.

As a young man, before there was any necessity to blue his hair and pink his cheeks, he had been a reckless *roué*. He drank and dined with the best, and the wonder is that out of the princely property he inherited from his uncle, he left himself enough to live on luxuriously in his old age. Yet with all

his libertinism, he was honourable and kind-hearted. Thanks to his libertinism, those two qualities were his ruin.

He had paid fierce court to a dancer who just at that time made a success in the ballet. His attentions were appreciated. Rosa Beltini—her real name was Jenkinson—reciprocated his passion. All went merrily for a time. Then there came a scene. Remorse! An awakened conscience! The old story, in short, which imposed on the generosity of Clayter. He married the Beltini to the horror of his relatives and the astonishment of his friends. With the remnant of chivalry which often survives in a man who is in most matters a complete *roué*, he treated Rosa as if she had been a peer's daughter. The settlements were duly drawn up, and the wedding was celebrated with great splendour.

Within six months of his marriage he found how little his experiences in libertinism had served him. He found he had been duped—basely duped. When he taxed his wife with infidelity she laughed at him—asked him what else he expected—and left him.

The next that he heard of her was that she had accepted an engagement in the United States, and there she remained for some years

achieving considerable popularity, as he learnt from occasional notices in the papers. At length came the terrible yet not unwelcome news of her death. Taking up the *Times* one day in a coffee-house, and reading it more exhaustively than usual, because the waiter was slow in serving him, he came upon a paragraph headed "Frightful Death of a Ballet Girl." It stated that while that popular favourite, the Beltini, was dancing in the ballet of the "Queen of the Fountain," she incautiously approached the wing, and set fire to her dress. In spite of superhuman efforts made to rescue her, she was so severely injured, before the fire could be extinguished, that she died in a few hours. The account was extracted from an American paper, which went on (after the fashion of Transatlantic prints) to discuss the unhappy woman's private life, saying that she was English by birth, though she bore an apparently Italian name, and that her previous life had been a romantic one.

Poor Clayter thanked his stars, when he got to the end of the paragraph, that the considerate journalist had not recorded the romantic history at full length—which he would probably have done, I dare say, if he had known it.

Of course, Clayter was now at liberty to marry again if he chose. But the burnt child dreads the fire—at least, for some time. He tried hard to settle down in single blessedness surrounded by all the comforts his wealth could purchase. But unluckily his was not the sort of disposition that could put up with a solitary existence. He was sociable and kindly, and, above all, he was just a little vain; and when a man is vain of his personal appearance, the only person who will ever take the trouble to gratify that vanity is a woman. So Clayter became a confirmed dangler, but as yet held aloof from any decided step towards matrimony. He scorched his wings pretty frequently, poor moth, but he did not quite bob into the consuming flame and perish.

Clayter's marriage had, as I said, disgusted his family. He was too sensitive to attempt to renew relations with them after his wife's death. It also, as I said, astonished his friends. As they were the friends of his libertine days, and his marriage and its painful results had sickened him of that kind of life, he left his friends behind him when he quitted their sphere, and they never troubled their heads about him again.

But he could not bear solitude, so he soon made friends with his neighbours, and by de-



grees enlarged the circle of his acquaintance by selecting friends from among their friends. In this way he came to be introduced to Aunt Chippin and her two nieces, and he dangled about the latter with great pleasure, especially in the case of Laura.

Laura found that Fortune had at last thrown in her way the chance of carrying her idea of marriage into practice. She studied all Clayter's little foibles, and worked upon them. She discovered his tastes, and coincided with them. She flattered him, and pretended to be enraptured with his delicate compliments and fussy attentions.

Aunt Chippin highly approved of her elder niece's tactics, and took every opportunity to forward them.

The fair ones, who—as has been recorded in the early part of this chapter—had not been averse from the youthful attractions of the aged Clayter, now changed their tune and talked about the wickedness of Aunt Chippin in encouraging the attentions of that “odious old foggy,” and condemned Laura vehemently for “making love to the old wretch for his money!” But then, as the poet has said, “’Twas ever thus!” Aunt Chippin and Laura could afford to laugh at the spite of the disappointed

damsels. For it was pretty evident that ere long Clayter must declare his intentions, and there was no possible doubt as to the answer that Laura would give to his question.

All this horrified poor little Mary beyond expression; but she was too weak to combat her sister's resolution, though she protested against it. With all her faults, Laura loved her sister dearly, and so she took her complaints with better grace than she would have borne those of others.

"You silly goose, what can one do in the world without money—and how can a woman get it save by marriage?" she would say.

"Yes—but to marry for money—and an old man!"

"All the better, I get the money with less encumbrance."

"Oh, Laura, how shocking! how can you say so?"

"Pooh, child! What should one marry for but money?"

"For love, Laura—for the mutual affection of two young hearts ready to struggle through life's thorny paths side by side." [You see, Mary read a good many sentimental novels, and her language was modelled on their style.]

“ Very well, Mary ; you shall marry for love, and I will marry for money—and as long as I have any you shall have half, for you will want it, my dear. Love won’t pay milliner, butcher, or baker. Only money can do that, so one cannot do without it—without love one can do very well indeed !”

Poor Mary could not argue—she could only shake her head and sigh. Laura held possession of the field, and she and Aunt Chippin shouted victory.

Laura had long been trying to bring Clayter to the point. But he, though he was completely dazzled with the notion of having won the affections of a young and handsome woman, had that instinctive dread of marriage which makes a trout that has once had a hook in its jaw look so suspiciously at all flies, natural or artificial, that offer a tempting mouthful.

Cupid is generally supposed to be the *Deus ex machinâ*, who brings true lovers together. The intervention of a third person settled the business for Laura and Clayter, and that third person was an urchin, like Cupid, only rather more fully clad.

Clayter was in the habit of taking horse-exercise. He rode a fat little cob with a coat like satin, and a temper that would have been

faultless if he had only been as well worked as he was fed. Good living and laziness had the usual effect upon him—he waxed fat and kicked. He also shied.

Laura was in the habit of taking walking exercise. She and her sister took a constitutional daily, and by some strange fatality they generally met Clayter in the course of their rambles, and he used to walk his cob beside them, and indulge in a chat with his charmer.

But this might have gone on indefinitely without any result, but for the above-mentioned urchin. Let history enshrine his name here—it was Tommy Wapshot. Tommy was the only son of a widowed washerwoman, and was by her employed in carrying out and bringing home the clothes of her customers, calling with her little bills, and making himself generally useful.

Tommy was an intelligent and observant lad, and as his mother could not spare the money or time for his education, he endeavoured to improve himself by picking up all he could in the streets, in which he spent most of his days.

Among the accomplishments which he was trying to master was an athletic performance, known to the initiated as “a cart-wheel.” He had seen it profitably practised by young gen-

tle men of his own age along the Brixton Road on Derby Day, and in his ambitious soul he burned to become a proficient. He had just delivered a basket of clothes at No. 17, in Brunswick Grove, and had been told to call again by-and-by, as the linen was not ready. Here then was an opportunity for practising the feat of agility he was learning. Running rapidly down the path, he flung himself out of the gate on his right hand, threw up his heels, and performed with fair success for a beginner the gyrational "cart-wheel."

He had an unexpected audience. On his right were Laura and Mary advancing to meet Clayter, who was jogging quietly along on his left. The sudden appearance of Tommy in this topsy-turvy manner startled all three. But a fourth party was still more astounded—Mr. Clayter's fat cob. First he jumped up on his hind legs and swerved half round; then, suddenly coming down again, he flung up behind. The result of this rapid manœuvre was that Clayter was thrown, and came down sprawling in the road. At this spectacle Tommy Wapshot set up a shrill whistle, and bolted as fast as his legs could carry him. The cob having given vent to his feelings, allowed the groom who was following his master to secure him. Fastening both

animals to the nearest gate, the man hastened to assist Mr. Clayter. But Clayter was not injured, though the knees of his trousers decidedly were. He picked himself up, cursing Tommy Wapshot for making him look ridiculous in the eyes of Laura.

Lo, and behold, he saw Laura in a dead faint. She had gone off in a swoon the moment—she saw him fall? Well, not exactly—the moment she saw him getting up again. Mary had tried to catch her, but was obliged to let her sink gradually, supporting her head.

To rush into No. 17, Brunswick Grove, and get a glass of water would have been the work of an instant, if the servant had not been quite two minutes ere she answered the door. When Clayter returned with the tumbler Laura had opened her eyes, and, supported on one side by the groom, and on the other by Mary, was inquiring, faintly, “Is he hurt? is he hurt?”

I need not describe the degrees by which she was brought round, until she pronounced herself “quite well again now! She was quite strong, and could walk home.” She declined Clayter’s offer of an escort, and entreated him not to think any more of her silly behaviour. Clayter accordingly remounted the cob, and turned homeward, after begging to be allowed

to call and see how she was in the afternoon. When he turned the corner of the Grove he set spurs to the cob, and gave it a smart gallop, to take the nonsense out of it. "Confound the brute, he doesn't get exercise enough," he said to his man, on dismounting, "You must take him out oftener, James."

Laura walked slowly along the Grove in the opposite direction to that taken by Clayter. Oddly enough, when she turned the corner her weight on Mary's arm was lightened, and she hurried along homeward at a sharp pace.

I suppose it was sympathy between two loving hearts. At any rate, Laura said to Aunt Chippin, "He will come to-day to propose." And Clayter, as he walked into his house, said, "Deuced nice girl, and must be fond of me to show such alarm. By Gad, I'll do it!"

CHAPTER III.

A PINCHBECK PALADIN.

GENTLE Reader — Captain Hassard! Captain Hassard — Gentle Reader! Now, you know each other.

At the same time I ought to apologise to the Gentle Reader for introducing him to such a scamp. To be strictly veracious, he is no more a Captain than I am: at least, he has no claim to the title in Her Majesty's dominions. He once held a commission, it is true, but that was an ensigncy in the Beeveshire Militia, and he did not hold that long.

Jack Hassard, as his friends, or rather companions, were wont to call him, was of good family. But he was a thoroughly black sheep, and his relations, after bearing with him as long as they could, had been compelled to cast him off.

He left the militia in very bad odour, owing to some disgraceful business in connection with cards. He had been the means of introducing

gambling into the regiment, and turned a pretty penny out of the inexperienced youngsters, who thought it a glorious thing to gamble and drink and swear, because Hassard assured them that the regulars always did it.

He was found out at last, and would have had a few duels on his hands, but that the practice had very properly been discountenanced about that time. But he had to sell out, and leave the country.

It was during the contest between the Carlists and Christinos in Spain that he found it necessary to seek change of air: so he went over to the Peninsula, and attached himself to the party of Don Carlos. He was not long in obtaining promotion; for, to give him his due, he was as brave as a lion. He was like a lion in other respects, besides brute courage. The lion, as modern naturalists and travellers have proved, is by no means the generous and high-minded Monarch of the Desert that old story-books described him to be. He is a predatory brute, prone to ambushes, and not above feeding on mice, or even frogs, in the absence of other provisions.

Hassard made a mistake in choosing the side of the Carlists—a choice which, for all the thought he gave it, might have been decided

by the tossing up of a doubloon. When the cause was finally lost, he found himself no better off than when he first drew his sword in the cause, unless we may put down tolerably heavy arrears of pay, never likely to be liquidated, among his assets.

Of course, it was rather hard upon him that he should be owed so much money which he had fairly earned. But he himself entertained such odd notions with regard to money matters and debt that he could hardly complain if he was paid back in his own coin. There was an ugly story about his having taken advantage of a skirmish with the enemy to shoot in the back a brother officer, to whom he had on the previous night lost rather heavily at cards.

In his relations with women he was scarcely more scrupulous. And the worst of it was that he was one of those handsome devil-may-care fellows who have a special charm in the eyes of the fair sex.

He might have been any age, for he was sun-burnt and weather-beaten; but had an erect soldierly bearing. He had a pair of keen grey eyes, so overhung by his thick eyebrows and heavy brow, that you could scarcely see how stony and cruel they were. His hair was brown,

a trifle sprinkled with silver, but you would have said less from age than exposure. He had a long heavy moustache, a trifle lighter than his hair. It served partly to conceal a lurid seam extending from cheek-bone to jaw—a memento from a Christino sabre.

He had other accomplishments besides skill in “correcting fortune” at cards. He danced well, and he sang with a fine manly voice to that most irresistible of all musical instruments to the feminine mind—the guitar. How strange it is that women should be so enraptured by such a near relative of the banjo, at which they sneer!

When he returned to England, Hassard was put to some shifts to live and keep up a decent appearance. He did what he called “turn an honest penny” at billiards, and had the prudence to play so far fairly that he could not be detected in anything worse than playing “dark.” To have ventured on anything more would have been to run the risk of having his only means of livelihood taken away. He lodged over a little news-shop in Camberwell, but he never allowed his acquaintance to know where he lived. His correspondence, which was not extensive, he had addressed to an hotel near the Strand, where they took in his letters in consi-

deration of his custom, which chiefly took the form of getting somebody else to pay for his brandy-and-water.

He was a popular man, for he had learned a lesson, and took particular pains not to be found out. It was the utmost concession he could make to virtue and respectability; and by dint of not being found out, he contrived to ingratiate himself. He could be very pleasant when he chose. He was full of anecdote, and men who were captivated by his stories about "when I was serving in Spain" at last invited him home. And once there, he made sure of becoming a constant visitor—especially if his host had a wife or daughters.

You would have thought him the most charming fellow in the world to see him teaching the girls how the Spanish ladies wield the fan, or showing mamma how the mantilla was worn. Or he would dance the bolero, or sing a Spanish ballad, or go through the manoeuvres of a bull-fight.

"What a delightful person that Captain Harsard is, to be sure!" was the invariable verdict after he was gone. And as he lighted his cigarette outside, and set out to walk home to his dingy apartment in Camberwell, he knew perfectly well that such would be the verdict; so he

strode out cheerfully, whistling a subdued whistle.

“You’ve done it, Jack, my boy! You’ll be invited again before long,” he would say to himself, and then fall to calculating whether the girls would have much money, and which he should pay most attention to. And thus, with a contented mind, this good creature would march home, whistling and smoking simultaneously. He had acquired the knack in Spain; no Spaniard looks upon smoking as anything different from breathing. They smoke and eat their dinners simultaneously, a whiff at the cigarette following every mouthful they take. They even smoke and fight, for Hassard had seen many a gallant fellow with a cigarette between his lips in the very heat of the contest—had seen him, when shot, drop from the saddle, still keeping the little twist of paper in his mouth.

Hassard’s circle of acquaintance grew pretty rapidly. He was a most fascinating fellow in company, you see; so that when the Browns met him at the Smiths’ party, they determined to make his acquaintance and secure him for their party too. He accepted all invitations with pleasure, for it was a matter of business with him. He was looking out for a woman

with money—young if possible, and pretty if possible, but with money—that was quite indispensable !

He was in no great hurry. He could manage to live pretty well. His billiards paid for his lodgings, and, now that his acquaintances were many, he could pretty nearly always contrive to get invited to lunch or dinner—or, at worst, could call and get a glass of sherry and a biscuit. He was an old campaigner, and could make even that slight refreshment do duty for a meal.

In truth, I think he was loth to surrender his freedom till he was absolutely compelled. Except working for a living, there was no greater sacrifice he could think of than giving up the liberty of bachelorhood.

As for working for a living, that was out of the question. It was a nuisance, and what was more—it was low ! One of his friends, more good-natured than discreet, had somehow guessed that times went hard with the Captain occasionally ; with all his cleverness Hassard could not always conceal it. This indiscreet friend hinted at the fact, and told the Captain that he knew a wine merchant in the City who would be glad to avail himself of the services of a gentleman acquainted with Spain and the Spanish tongue. But Hassard put a stop to



the offer at once, by saying that none of "his people" had ever been in trade, and that his family would not hear of his taking such a situation.

"It's deuced hard—I don't know any work that's harder than to be a gentleman with limited means. But, *caramba*, what's a fellow to do? He can't fly in the teeth of his family!"

You may be sure this little mention of his family and its exalted notions was not allowed to lapse into oblivion. Smith told Mrs. Smith what the Captain had said; and Mrs. Smith told Mrs. Brown in strict confidence; and Mrs. Brown, very properly holding that there should be no secrets between husband and wife, repeated it to Brown; and Brown, in a moment of forgetfulness, blurted it out to Jones, and so it "went the rounds." And it did the Captain no injury; on the contrary, the good people amongst whom he moved looked upon him as a superior being, through whom something of the glory of aristocratic birth was shed around them. Some of them, no doubt, went so far as to consider that he was the heir to a title.

Such was the fascinating scamp, surrounded by a genteel mystery, and generally adored by the young ladies—such was the scamp whom

Misfortune must needs throw in the path of soft-hearted, sentimental Mary Mardale.

They met at a party, where, as usual, Hassard was the lion of the evening. The girls were accompanied by Aunt Chippin, who, on the strength of her supposed wealth, was treated with great respect and ceremony by the snobs who were present.

"Who's the old girl in a green turban?" asked Hassard of young Twistleton—a meek youth, in a bank in the City, who worshipped the Captain at a respectful distance, and blushed to the roots of his hair at the honour the Captain did him by taking him aside and talking to him.

"That's Miss Chippin," he said, proud to be of service to the Captain in the humblest way. "That's Miss Chippin, the rich old lady who lives at 'The Yews'—the big house, you know, with the yew trees in front. She's said to be immensely rich, but very eccentric—just a trifle"—here he tapped his empty little head with a knowing wink.

"Oh! And who are the girls with her?"

"The Miss Mardales, her nieces. They are her only relatives, so they'll come in for all her tin—a pretty pot of it, too. The dark one's Laura, the fair one's Mary. I think old Clayter—you know Clayter, don't you?—well, I think

he's spoony on Laura. Downy old Clayter, eh?"

Hassard *did* know Clayter. He had dined with that worthy, and he had a great respect for his taste in cookery and his knowledge of wines.

"That's the way of the wind, is it?" said he to himself, leaving young Twistleton in the lurch, now he had got all he required out of him. "Clayter's no fool! Shrewd man of the world—not such an ass as to fall in love with a pretty face only, at his age. He's hooked the best fish; but if the old girl is pretty warm, she'll be able to make a good provision for the younger one. She's pretty, too; and one can't expect to get good looks and coin both, every day of one's life. No bad spec either to have such a brother-in-law as Clayter! *Adelante!* Come on, Jack Hassard! Go in and win!"

He had little difficulty in getting an introduction to Aunt Chippin. As he was brought up to her for that purpose, Laura vacated her seat in order to dance a quadrille with Clayter. As a delicate compliment to that gentleman, she "never danced round dances, thank you," when the young fellows came and asked her to waltz. When the triumphant Clayter led her off, Has-

sard, after a few moments' chat with Aunt Chip-pin, sat down in Laura's place, and devoted himself to fascinating the old girl. He did so without much difficulty, and he saw with considerable satisfaction that he was interesting the niece while charming the aunt; for Mary's big blue eyes opened wider and wider as she listened to his cheerful rattle.

He, as if by accident, turned the conversation to Spain and the war there, and soon learnt that Mary was a romantic girl of the Desdemona type, whom it would be easy to win by relating his adventures (veracious or fictitious) in the battle-field.

When the quadrille was over, and Laura had been escorted back to the seat, which he instantly vacated in her favour, he requested to be allowed the pleasure of dancing the waltz, which was to follow, with Mary. His request was granted, and he turned the opportunity to good account.

He flattered poor Mary by telling her that she was the first English girl he had met who could dance like a Spaniard. And that turning the conversation to Spanish women, he contrived artfully to pay her a side compliment by comparing the brunettes, to their decided disadvantage, with the fair beauties of his own country.

"What nonsense people talk about black eyes, to be sure! I suppose the finest examples of black eyes are to be found in Spain. But they are only glass beads—expressionless and unsympathetic! No, give me the English style of beauty—the speaking blue eyes, the delicate complexions, the golden hair of my fair countrywomen, before all the dark-eyed donnas in Spain!"

"But I have always heard Spanish women were so lovely!" said Mary, whose notions of Spanish women were derived from novels.

"I have seen *handsome* women there," said the Captain; "but women ought not to be handsome according to my notion—they should leave that for mankind. Prettiness is my idea of the perfect loveliness of woman"—here he gave a respectful but admiring glance at his partner.

"But the Spanish ladies dance well, you said," Mary observed.

"Yes. To do them justice, they are graceful; but then the national dances teach them that. I suppose you have never seen any of their dances? I should like to show you some; they are easy to learn, and *you* would dance them capitally."

"Oh, I should like it above all things. I have read about them very often," said Mary,

delighted at the notion of figuring in the romantic dances of Spain.

"I must hope for some favourable opportunity of showing you. We could hardly venture on it here."

"Oh, no," said Mary, horrified at the very notion. "I couldn't do it before all these people for the world."

"Do you play the guitar?" he asked.

"No. I am sorry to say I can't. Is it very difficult?"

"As easy as possible. I would lend you my poor instrument to try, if it were not that I should not like to have to reproach myself for putting these dainty fingers to torture;" and he glanced down at her hand as it rested on his arm.

"Does it hurt them?"

"Well, it does not improve them. I am always strumming on my old guitar—and see!" he showed her his hand and its hardened fingertips. Her eye was attracted to a quaint ring with a blue stone which he wore on his little finger.

"Pardon my rudeness," she said; "but that is a foreign ring, is it not? It is so peculiar."

"Yes, I got it in Spain, under rather peculiar—rather painful circumstances."

“Indeed? Do tell me; I’m so fond of anything romantic.”

“It’s not a long story. One day we had a skirmish with some of Espartero’s troops in a little village some miles from Burgos. We drove them out of it, and as I was galloping along after our general—I was *aide-de-camp*—I heard the screams of a woman coming from a house I was passing. I drew my sword, dismounted, tied up my horse, and entered. I found there two of our ruffians who, instead of following up the enemy, had turned aside for plunder. They had stripped the house of its valuables, and were robbing a woman, apparently its mistress, of her jewellery. She had one or two valuable rings on, and the wretches, unable to pull them off, were actually chopping off her fingers. I blew one fellow’s brains out, and cut the other down, but I was too late to save her. Before she died she gave me this ring as a memento of her gratitude.”

Mary shuddered at the story, and said “how dreadful,” but her eyes spoke warm admiration of his bravery. What could she do but surrender her heart at discretion to this hero—this *chevalier des dames*? The Captain chuckled inwardly as he saw the effect his narrative had wrought.

There was some foundation of truth for his story—but not much. He did become possessed of the ring during a skirmish in a village near Burgos. But it was while he and his party were being driven out of the place by the Christinos, that he dashed into a house which afforded promise of plunder. But he had been forestalled. The place had been completely ransacked. But on the stairs was the dead body of a woman, and on her finger was this ring, which he removed, not without some violence—I am not sure that he did not mutilate the dead hand in order to obtain the jewel. That he retained the ring still was due to the fact that it was worthless, as he had discovered on attempting to negotiate a loan upon it with the only one of his relatives who had not cast him off—"his uncle;" that uncle whose arms are three golden bezants, with the motto "Money Lent."

I ought, perhaps, in fairness to the scamp, to say, that his plundering propensities in this instance nearly led to his being made prisoner, for when he came out of the house the enemy were upon him, and he had to fight his way against tremendous odds, and got in so doing the sabre-cut which made his face so picturesque.

That night Mary went home to dream of this

hero of hers as a very Bayard, laying his laurels at her feet. Meanwhile, Bayard was strutting complacently towards Camberwell, puffing at his cigarette, and whistling a loud march of triumph.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNRECOGNIZED HERO.

THE practice of Dr. Lancelot Oldham was rambling rather than remunerative. His patients were more plentiful than prosperous. You will not be surprised at this when I tell you that the district to which he devoted his energies lay within the odorous precincts of the Borough, where an agglomeration of noisome trades supplied a variety of stench,es, that left Coleridge's two and seventy "well defined and several stinks" of Cologne hopelessly in the rear. Why alms-houses should so congregate where the air is so noxiously perfumed is a mystery, but they seem to be almost equal in number to the above-recited stench,es.

The doctor's house stood at the corner of a street running out of Nelson-square, a small and dingy house, with a little surgery-door at the side, and a blear-eyed red lamp over it. A brass plate recorded the name of "L. Oldham, surgeon and accoucheur," and there was a night-

bell attached to the front entrance. It was, I suppose, in consequence of what is called the compensatory principle of nature, that, in the poverty-stricken and sickly neighbourhood where the doctor's practice lay, the births were to the full as numerous as the deaths—and the deaths were frequent enough! There was one epidemic especially that carried off a great many—I don't know the exact medical name for it, in fact I don't know that it has one; but at coroners' inquests the jury describe the disorder as "want of sufficient nourishment." It is generally, I think, found supplementing and aggravating some other ailment, and, as a rule, figures in verdicts as "accelerating" something else.

It was fortunate that Dr. Lancelot Oldham was a young and strong man, as well as a clever and kind physician. He had enough to do, what with the births and the deaths; and poorly enough was he paid.

His wife was a great invalid. She was the daughter of old Jenkinson, the scene-painter at the Royal Southwark Theatre. The fall of some heavy machinery in the painting-room had injured the old man, and Oldham had been called in to attend on him. While attending him he saw his daughter and fell in love with her. But

Polly was a good girl, and though sincerely attached to the young doctor, she refused him, because she had been her father's housekeeper ever since her mother's death, and she could not leave him. But the obstacle was speedily removed when Oldham discovered what it was. They were married forthwith, and old Jenkinson took up his abode with them, and stayed with them until he died.

The year in which Jenkinson died, Polly—I beg pardon, Mrs. Oldham, gave birth to her first child, a boy, whom they christened Lancelot, after his father.

Life was a hard struggle for the young doctor, but he bore it cheerfully and without a murmur. The very sight of him in a sick-room was like a tonic. He was one of those doctors who inspire you with confidence the moment you see them. You see in the collected, clear gaze of such a man the power to combat the grisly spectre whose lean hand is upon you. As might be expected, Lancelot Oldham was beloved by his poor patients. The living blest him as their preserver, the dying as their comforter,

And when his hand unbarred the shutter,
The clammy lips of fever smiled
The welcome that they could not utter.

It was an enviable life, with all its hardships and struggles.

When the child was a couple of months old, there was a terrible visitation of cholera, which decimated the poor people in the doctor's overcrowded district. He was terribly hard-worked now, as he had no assistant. His wife was obliged to help him by sitting in the surgery while he was out, and dispensing cholera-medicine to the numerous applicants, who kept the little bell on the outer door in a perpetual tinkle.

It was one of these mornings when Mrs. Oldham was doing assistant's work in the surgery, that a woman who was passing along the street caught sight of the plate on the door and stopped.

"Dr. L. Oldham! It must be!" she muttered, as she turned back and peered through the half-open door, left ajar by a child who had gone in to fetch some physic for her sick mother.

The stranger listened, until she heard Mrs. Oldham speak. Then she gave a start and smiled.

"That's Polly—but what is she doing there? Has she turned doctor, I wonder?"

As soon as the child left the surgery the

stranger entered. Mrs. Oldham was nursing her baby, and did not for a few moments notice the new-comer, who took the opportunity of examining the young mother closely.

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor's wife, looking up at last, "I did not hear you come in. My husband is out—what is it you require? I may be able to manage it."

"No, thank you, Polly, you dosed me often enough when I was a child. No more of your motherly doses for me!" said the stranger, with a noisy laugh.

Mrs. Oldham turned pale, and then red. She staggered to her feet, staring hard at the other. It was some time ere she could gather strength to speak.

"Bessie!" she gasped at last. "Bessie! Alive! Why, we—we thought you—you"—— and then she stopped.

"Thought I was dead! Say it out; I don't mind, for I'm not dead, you see. And I've no intention of dying either; for I'm young and strong, and can always command a salary."

"I'm glad to see you alive and well, Bessie, very glad. We mourned sorely when the report came, and father never forgot it. He whispered your name as he was dying."

"Dead!" said the other, but without any

intonation of sorrow. "Ah, he was getting up in years. Poor old chap!"

Mrs. Oldham sighed, and looked at the other with a pained expression in her face.

"You're not very sisterly or affectionate, at any rate. I'll say that for you," said the stranger.

"What am I to do, Bessie? My husband has never heard of you—father wouldn't let me tell him, and I spared his grey hairs the—the—sorrow!"

"Shame, you were going to say. Say it, by all means. I've had my share of rough words and cruel words, and I don't expect my sister to spare me."

"Oh, Bessie, you nearly broke my heart—you, the tiny thing that I had brought up from the cradle—that were more like my child than my sister. So young!"

"There, don't preach. I've had enough of *that*, too, in my time," said the other; then, abruptly changing the subject, she asked, "is that the only one?" and she pointed to the sleeping child.

"Yes, bless him," said the mother, fondly. The next minute a recollection seemed to flash across her. She looked at her sister uneasily—"and your child?"

"Well—and well-off! I made him take charge of her, the old villain; and she'll be in luck when the devil comes for his own!"

"And you have given her up?"

"Best for her—and for me too! I've been a wanderer ever since—what could I have done with a child at my back? Besides, nobody will twit her with her birth now."

"You have been a wanderer—where? The news of your death came from somewhere abroad, I remember, now I think of it."

"Pooh, that was only a poor imitator—it's common enough in our business for inferior people to steal the names of their betters and trade on their reputation. That unhappy devil was starring under false colours when she met with her death."

"And you never contradicted it?"

"No. I had my reasons. I was married"—

"Married? Not to *him*?"

"No, not to *him*! But to a fool, on whom I revenged the wrongs I had suffered at a villain's hands. I wanted people to believe me dead."

"And your husband—is he dead now?"

"Yes, dead! Or dead to me, it's the same thing. I shall never cross his path again, nor he mine in this world."

"Do you really mean dead? I don't understand you."

"You were always a fool, my dear, though you were the elder. Dead, I tell you, to me; and so, dead to all the world to all intents and purposes. Dead! Dead! Dead!"

"And you—what are you doing now?"

"Oh, the old dreary business—bismuth and rouge, and muslin skirts. I'm not looking a bit older than when you saw me last, am I?"

"You are scarcely altered—very little!"

"Oh, I'm well preserved. I never let anything trouble me. It's not age, but worry that brings wrinkles. Bless you, I shouldn't so much as sigh for the biggest trouble in the world. I have done with heart—it's a useless incumbrance. Mine is like a stone. I'll defy any one to hurt it. That's what keeps me so young and fresh still. Why I have admirers by the score still! Young fools and old fools, rich and poor—what does it matter to me. I don't care a pin's head for the lot; but I make them buy tickets of me, and make me handsome presents—but it's precious little they get in return beyond their proper share of the smile to the whole house that I go on with."

"Poor simple-minded Mrs. Oldham gave a heavy sigh. Could this cold-hearted brazen

woman be the little sister over whose childhood she had watched? What spell could have so changed her whole nature? The evil magic of man's selfish passion—the chemistry of cruelty and desertion and dishonour!

“And now,” continued her sister, “I’ve told you my story. Tell me yours. We are sisters, after all said and done, and I ought to hear all about you.”

Mrs. Oldham gave her a brief outline of their life and its struggles, to which the other listened not too attentively. When the account was finished, she gave a short laugh.

“A parish doctor, eh! I heard he was a doctor, and his name, and when I saw the brass plate on the door I guessed who it was. But, bless me, at such pay, and with such work, he's worse off than a super at the theatre! If I were in his place, whenever I was called to attend any one I'd give them a dose of poison, and then they wouldn't bother me again—and all the better for them too, as well as me! There, don't look shocked; I would. And it would be a deal kinder than giving them all these nasty messes”—with a contemptuous toss of the head towards the bottles and drawers—“and then letting 'em die after all; because they can't dine on physic, however hungry they are.”

Mrs. Oldham began to be uneasy, for it was

getting near the time when she expected her husband to return.

“What are you fidgetting about?” asked her sister abruptly.

“I am expecting my husband home every minute. And he knows nothing of you, and I should like to prepare—to tell him”——

“You mean in so many words you wish I’d go. Well, I’m going; and now that I’ve satisfied my curiosity, you’re not likely to see me again, so you needn’t trouble yourself to tell him, if you don’t want. There’ll be no occasion. Good-bye!”

With that, this strange woman disappeared with a hasty nod, leaving poor Mrs. Oldham in dire bewilderment and distress.

When her husband returned, he was so worn out with his labours, and so vexed by the difficulties he had had to encounter in trying to prevail on the parochial authorities to do their duty, that she felt it would be cruel to trouble him with the history of her sister—a history which, supposing its unhappy heroine to be dead, the father had not thought it necessary to tell Lancelot Oldham.

Mrs. Oldham, however, determined that her husband should learn this wretched story now. She would take the earliest opportunity of telling him. But the earliest opportunity never

came. Day after day the terrible pestilence raged, and grew more and more violent. It was an awful time for the priest and the doctor in that crowded district. The parish authorities had no longer the power, even if they had the will, to cope with the gigantic evil. The sick and the dead were left in the same room together for days, because the parish undertaker could not make the coffins quick enough. It was in vain that Beadledom, at length waked to the necessity of doing something, wandered about whitewashing the wretched hovels in the teeming alleys and streets.

When the plague began to abate—as it did at length—it was rather because it lacked victims than because human skill or science had discovered the means of combating it, though a devoted little band fought the ground with it foot by foot.

At last the victory was won, the pestilence was retiring, and its brave opponents rallied, and redoubled their efforts to stamp it out completely. The victory was won—but it was won at a price. Out of the resolute body of brave men and true Christians who had borne the bitter brunt of that long tussle with Death in one of its most ghastly forms, more than one was missing, when they met together at the church, by the vicar's desire, to render thanks for the cessation of the plague.

Two nights before that solemn gathering, Lancelot Oldham came home weary, but not down-hearted.

"We've beaten it at last, dear," said he, as he sat down in his easy chair; "it has been a terrible tug of war, but I see light at last!" and he laughed a short hollow laugh, the sound of which alarmed his wife.

"Lancelot, how shockingly bad you look!"

"I feel utterly done-up—but I think it's only the reaction, now that the strain is over."

"Let me get you a glass of wine."

"Can't afford luxuries, my love!"

"Luxuries! Why it is medicine in this case. Nay, I prescribe it, and you must not set a bad example of disobedience to a doctor."

So, smilingly, she unlocked the cupboard and brought out the decanter. They kept a slender stock of wine, for the kind-hearted doctor often sent out a small bottle of it with other less palatable draughts in cases where he knew it would be of service. He took the decanter from his wife's hand, and began to pour himself a glass.

"How you tremble, dear," said his wife, anxiously, as the mouth of the decanter tinkled against the wine-glass while he poured.

"Overstrained nerves, my darling, and want of rest. We'll get to bed early to-night and

get a good sleep, only provided some good woman doesn't take it into her head to require my services."

So the weary doctor and his wife retired to rest. But in the middle of the night he was called up by that merciless shrill-tongued night bell, and had to get up and dress to go out. A cold driving rain had succeeded to a sultry autumn day, and the chill seemed to pierce his very marrow as he walked through the lonely gloomy streets.

The next day he was unable to rise. The exposure to the cold, in his feverish and feeble state, had roused the latent seeds of consumption into active life. He did not suffer long. In a few weeks he was laid in the earth, mourned by an immense crowd, whose grief was not the less sincere because their poverty forbade their indulging in any of the outward trappings of woe.

Before he closed his eyes he had the satisfaction of knowing that his wife and child would be provided for. His heroism and self-devotion, even in the humble sphere where his duty lay, had not escaped notice. Sir Robert Peel, that great statesman, whose kindly sympathy and ready aid were always extended to struggling genius or inobtrusive merit, had noted his case.

He was too late to do more than restore poor Oldham's peace of mind by securing for his wife a home in an institution of which he was a patron, and by promising for the child, as soon as it was old enough, a presentation to one of the best of our City schools.

Mrs. Oldham, broken and prematurely aged, retired to the asylum, where she spent the remainder of her days. The boy grew up, and in due time went to school, where he applied himself to his studies with great assiduity. His mother had died before he had finished his education. Not long after, he lost the noble patron, who would doubtless have seen the lad launched in the world, had he lived. He had now no friends in the world, save the masters of his school, who were all proud of the boy, and pleased with his zeal and energy. The head-master obtained him the post of secretary to a small society. The pay was poor, but it was at least bread, and a roof. He began to try and earn a little with his pen. At last, by imperceptible degrees—for who can define the magnetic power by which the Press draws to itself the men it chooses!—young Lancelot Oldham became a regular journalist, and earned a fair subsistence.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE BELLS ARE SET RINGING.

THE hand of Time—or, to be literal instead of figurative, the hand of the clock—had barely made one revolution on the dial, and Tommy Wapshot had certainly not turned himself heels over head twice, after the eventful cart-wheel chronicled in my second chapter, when Clayter carried into effect the resolution, which he is therein recorded as clenching with the solemn and touching, if slightly undignified, asseveration—“By Gad, I’ll do it!”

Attired in his most youthful suit, brushed carefully, so that not a speck of dust could be discovered on it, and with a blush-rosebud in his button-hole, he sallied forth from Claytersville, with a palpitating heart and patent-leather boots. He strode along jauntily, and hummed a cheery tune—or what he meant for a tune—for the increased action of his heart was not due to anxiety or doubt, but to joy. He knew that he was the conquering hero



whose anthem he believed he was humming, as he marched towards "The Yews" with a "*lum tum ti-tum tum, tiddle liddle lum tum, tum tum. Tiddle liddle lum tum, tum tum, tiddle liddle lum tum tum !*"

Arrived at "The Yews," he inquired for Miss Chippin, blushing to his parting—which was growing a wide one by this time, though you couldn't call him bald—because he felt that Eliza Jane, when she opened the door to him, had divined his errand. Eliza Jane could not do otherwise; she had gleaned something of the coming event from conversations between Laura and Aunt Chippin, and her surmises had been confirmed when the former said to her that when Mr. Clayter called he was to be asked in without delay. Whether the command was due to the warmth of her affection, and her longing to behold her beloved again as soon as possible, or arose from a suspicion that if kept waiting he might be so far carried away by his feelings as to bolt, as nervous people do at times after ringing a dentist's bell, I cannot undertake to say. Anyhow, Eliza Jane divined the mystery, and was put into a flutter of expectation, as is ever the case with a woman when taking part, no matter how slightly or remotely, in a love affair. Eliza Jane was not versed in the

etiquette of courtship among gentlefolk, so that she was a little taken aback when Clayter asked for Miss Chippin instead of Miss Mardale.

"Lor, he can't be a-goin' to perpose to missis," thought she; and, guessing that in his confusion he had mentioned the wrong name, she inquired, "Did you say Miss Chippin, sir, or Miss Laura?"—which made Clayter blush again, as he explained that it was the elder lady whom he wished to see.

Aunt Chippin received him graciously; and, thus encouraged, he lost no time in beating about the bush, but plunged at once into the heart of the business that had brought him to "The Yews."

"My dear madam," said he, fidgetting on his chair, and gazing into the crown of the hat he held in his hand, as if he had his speech written down there, "you must have observed the interest, the deep interest, with which your niece Laura has inspired me—the, in fact, affection she has inspired in me. I believe—I mean, I venture to flatter myself that it is not altogether unreturned. I am, in short, about to ask her if it is not so—to ask her, in fact, if she will be mine. Before doing so, however, I felt it my duty to ask you, madam, who stand

to her in the light of a parent, whether I have your consent in doing so ? ”

“ My dear Mr. Clayter,” said Aunt Chippin, with effusion, “ you have not only my consent, but my sincere approbation—though I shall be sorry to lose the dear girl.”

“ And do you think I shall succeed ? ” he asked, nervously ; “ there is some disparity in age.”

“ Oh dear, that is very slight. You are quite a young man, Mr. Clayter, quite ; and dear Laura, though not arrived yet at what they call years of discretion, is so staid and thoughtful beyond her years, that she is not to be considered a child. Dear girl, I think, if my old eyes have not deceived me, Mr. Clayter ”—and here she wagged her old head at him knowingly—“ you have ensured yourself a favourable answer. Oh, dear, dear ! You men—you men ! What fascinating creatures you can be when you like. Fie, fie, fie ! ”

Clayter giggled and blushed again, with delight and bashfulness combined.

Then Aunt Chippin assumed an air of great gravity and mystery.

“ There is one point, Mr. Clayter,” said she, “ on which I feel it my duty to speak to you at once, and without reserve. I feel sure that I

may implicitly trust you with the knowledge—quite sure. But it is due to both of us to know that my nieces have no dowries—in short, are penniless ”——

“ My dear madam, say no more ! ”

“ Pardon me, my dear Mr. Clayter, but I wish you to know all. The dear girls were left orphans—quite unprovided for—at an early age. I myself have nothing in the world but a small annuity, and could therefore do nothing for them save offer them a home. I have nothing, positively nothing, to leave them.”

“ My dear Miss Chippin, if you could leave them Golconda, or the Bank of England, it could make no difference in my regard for your niece. Laura is an inestimable treasure in herself—I ask no more. I am well enough off to make my wife a comfortable home, and to surround her with all the luxuries she can desire.”

“ You are generosity itself, my dear Mr. Clayter,” said Aunt Chippin, rising, and pressing his hand warmly ; “ I will send the dear girl to you.”

In a few minutes the blushing Laura entered. I call her blushing because the colour in her cheeks was considerably heightened as she came in. It was quite natural that it should be, for she had administered a smart scrubbing

to them with her pocket-handkerchief as she came down stairs.

"Good morning," she said, with a noticeable tremor in her voice, though she attempted to conceal it by speaking rapidly—"good morning, Mr. Clayter. I hope you were not hurt to-day. It was so silly of me to be so nervous, wasn't it? But you know I am terribly nervous about horses, and I was so afraid you would be seriously hurt. You are not hurt, I hope?"

"Yes, Miss Mardale, I am hurt," said Clayter, with a gallant air, "seriously hurt."

"Oh, I'm so sorry—so very sorry;" and in her sympathy she quite unconsciously laid both her hands on Clayter's arm. He took one of them, and squeezed it fondly.

"Yes, and the injury is here!" he said laying his hand on his heart, "and you alone have the power to heal it. Will you, Laura—dearest Laura (may I call you so?)—will you with one little word restore me? Will you be mine?"

He drew her towards him as he spoke, and she made little or no resistance.

"Say, dearest Laura, may I hope to make you my wife?"

The only answer was a little sigh as she let her head sink upon his waistcoat.

"One little word, darling! Say you will be mine!"

The smallest type in the printing-office would be inadequate to realise the tiny "Yes!" which Laura whispered in answer to this appeal.

Thereupon Clayter kissed her with considerable fervour. She repulsed him very feebly—remarkably feebly.

"What have I said?" she murmured. "You do not know that I am a penniless orphan. I am no fit match for one so wealthy, so"—

Clayter kissed her again to silence her.

"Not another word! What are riches compared with the graces and virtues you possess, dearest Laura! If I dared only to hope that some day I may be found worthy of your love, I shall be rich indeed."

Laura thought this was an opportunity not to be lost, so she hid her face on his waistcoat, and in her most diminutive voice murmured, "I have always loved you, dear Mr. Clayter!"

"Call me Reginald—call me your own Reginald," said the old goose, clasping her to his bosom with rapture, and with a vigour that threatened the disestablishment of the hooks and eyes of her trim, not to say tight, bodice.

"Dear Reginald!" she murmured.

"I never thought I should like my own name

so much," said Clayter; "and now, my adored girl, it only remains for you to name the day when I can claim you as my own—my precious wife!"

"Oh—I—I must ask Aunt Chippin. I—I daren't decide!"

"Then I must ask dear Miss Chippin to have mercy upon me, and suggest the earliest possible date."

I need not chronicle any more of this tender interview. Aunt Chippin, being consulted, named a day not far distant, but on the further side of quarter-day, in order that she might have her annuity to expend on fitting out the bride.

"You won't want a large or expensive *trousseau*, my love," said Aunt Chippin, "for I told him how we were situated, and he won't expect it."

So the outfit was plain and reasonable. There was no necessity to purchase finery or ornaments; for, from the day of his acceptance, Clayter seemed to delight in loading her with presents of jewellery, and decorations of all kinds. It is one of the peculiarities of the etiquette of such a situation that a man may give his *fiancée* anything except what is really useful and necessary. I doubt much whether

King Cophetua dared so far to fly in the face of Society as to present the beggar-maid who was to be his bride with a pair of shoes and stockings, though he might have given her the Koh-i-noor with general approval. Yet she was barefoot, so that the shoes and stockings would have been a sensible offering ; whereas, since she had not a shawl to her back, she had little use for a diamond brooch. But I suppose the whole thing is one of Society's satires. As the man is about to marry—or, in the language of Society, is “going to make a fool of himself,”—it compels him to keep up the character, by forbidding him to do what is rational, but permitting him to do what is idiotic !

On one point Clayter insisted on disregarding etiquette. He insisted on providing the breakfast, and Aunt Chippin, after a feigned resistance, gave way. “Of course it ought to be a breakfast worthy of the occasion, and of dear Mr. Clayter's position and means, and her circumstances would not allow of her doing it as she would have liked, so out of consideration for him she would consent.”

During the period which preceded the wedding, Clayter and Captain Hassard were thrown together pretty often ; and the latter, you may

be sure, spared no pains to make himself agreeable. Clayter, like all men in his position, needed a friend who would listen with patience to his romantic nonsense, and found in Hassard a capital listener. The Captain was at free quarters at Claytersville now, and was so comfortable there that he wished the wedding might be put off indefinitely ; for he felt that when that event was over he would no longer be invested with the freedom of that pleasant mansion.

He tried to pump Clayter as to the money question, but he got nothing by the motion. Clayter was not quite so high-minded and independent as his gracious majesty Cophetua the Somethingth, and did not care to make it known that he was about to marry a beggar-maid. He did not even tell the Captain that the wedding breakfast was of his providing ; so that when that gallant officer saw the splendour, and reckoned up the cost of that banquet, his estimate of Aunt Chippin's wealth was proportionately increased. It was a most unfair combination of circumstances, arranged by fate for the confusion and deception of this brave warrior.

Among the many services which Clayter prevailed upon Hassard to perform for him, was

one which more than repaid the warrior for all his trouble. Clayter had purchased a magnificent lace bridal veil ; but, considering that it was scarcely included in the category of presents which he might make, he asked Hassard to aid him in an innocent fraud, by presenting the veil as if it were a wedding gift from him. Hassard, inwardly delighted, feigned some reluctance, and declared that he had designed to give the bride some small offering within the reach of his humble means ; but Clayter pooh-poohed his objections, and the Captain ultimately consented. Once having agreed to the deception, he threw himself into it heart and soul, and told Aunt Chippin—who went into raptures over the lace—that he had sent over specially to Spain for it to a convent where they were famed for their lace-manufacture.

The eventful day came at last. The whole population of Brixton, including Master Tommy Wapshot, who was profoundly ignorant of his participation in the cause of the great event, gathered round the gates of "The Yews," attracted by that most intelligible phenomenon—a string of carriages with grey horses, and with highly "favoured" coachmen. The bells of Brixton church were clashing a merry peal,

and everything promised a brilliant and joyous day.

Captain Hassard was groom's-man, and Mary was first bridesmaid. Mr. Wagstaffe, one of Aunt Chippin's oldest acquaintances and neighbours, was to give away the bride, and his daughters Louisa and Julia were bridesmaids. Young Twistleton, under special leave of absence from the Bank, was told off to escort these damsels, and was, as usually happens to gentlemen in his position on such occasions, over head and ears in love with the elder within ten minutes of leaving the church after the ceremony. The champagne at breakfast aggravated the symptoms, but when next day he managed to get rid of his headache, he lost the affection of the heart with it, leaving Miss Wagstaffe free to marry eventually a stock-broker.

The ceremony passed off with the usual incidents. Of course Clayter said, "I will" in the wrong place, and equally of course he couldn't for the life of him remember in which pocket he had put the ring. Of course, too, Aunt Chippin and Mary cried their eyes red, and even Laura felt it would be becoming to drop a tear, or appear to do so. Lastly—and in like manner, of course—the names were

signed, and the shakiness or firmness of the writing laughingly commented upon, while the reverend vicar uttered his stereotyped compliment, and the clerk pocketed his fee.

The general population, including Master Tommy Wapshot, who celebrated the event by throwing a cartwheel by the side of the carriage containing the bride and bridegroom, cheered loudly as the party drove off, as if Clayter and Laura had been their dearest and most intimate friends, whose happy union in the teeth of adverse circumstances had been the dream and ambition of their lives.

Back rolled the carriages to "The Yews," followed as before by the general population, including Master Tommy Wapshot. As the breakfast was laid in the drawing-room, which was in front of the house, the clatter of the knives and forks, with an occasional view of the waiters, would constitute one of those free exhibitions at which a British crowd will stand and stare by the hour. Nothing but a policeman, recruited by occasional glasses of sherry, could have restrained the mob from entering the gates of "The Yews," and taking up commanding positions at the windows.

The breakfast was, like most wedding break-

fasts, a combination of affected melancholy that was downright ludicrous, and of ghastly pretences of mirth that were absolutely depressing. Speeches there were of necessity. There was the Oration Ponderous, wherein Mr. Wagstaffe conveyed delicately to every mind the conviction that in marrying Laura, Clayter was guilty of selfish ferocity, and could have no other design than to make her wretched for life. There was the Defence Ineffective, in which Clayter, responding to Wagstaffe, vainly tried to persuade his hearers that he was not the greatest brute under the sun, and had no intention of making Laura miserable. Then came the Speech Spooney, in which Hassard described the catching nature of the wedding ceremony; and, speaking for all the bachelors, declared their anxiety to marry woman in general, and the bridesmaids in particular, out of hand. Last of all was the Chirp Imbecile, in which the bewildered Twistleton, returning thanks for the bridesmaids, talked the most hopeless and meaningless nonsense in broken jerky sentences for about five minutes, and then coming to a dead lock in the middle of a sentence, sat down suddenly as if he had been shot.

Tears and farewells followed, and the bride

and bridegroom were whisked off to the railway station in time for the "boat train," Laura having expressed a wish to spend the honeymoon on the Continent. The promise of the early morning was not carried out; by the time the happy pair started it had begun to rain, which threw a figurative as well as an actual damp over their departure. Nor did the ill-starred Twistleton contribute to the comfort of the newly-wedded couple, when, having borrowed one of Aunt Chippin's old shoes for the special purpose of throwing it after them for luck, he flung it with so awkward a hand as to knock the bridegroom's hat off, the missile cannoning off that object and catching the bride on the bridge of the nose: the result being that they drove off amid the guffaws instead of the cheers of the general populace, including Master Tommy Wapshot, whom nothing but respect for the Majesty of the Law, as typified by the policeman herein-before-mentioned, would have restrained from accompanying the bride and bridegroom to the station, in defiance of the spikes behind the brougham and of those cries of "whip behind" which other boys less fortunate—such is ever the tribute which Envy pays to Success!—would have been certain to shout after the carriage.

CHAPTER VI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

“OHO ! so old Clayter’s married again, is he ?

On the 14th inst., at the parish church, Brixton, by the Rev. the Vicar, Reginald Rede Clayter, Esq., of Claytersville, Brixton-road, to Laura, eldest daughter of the late Julius Mardale, Esq., M.D.

Well, I hope this one will treat him better than the last !—he ! he ! ” And the speaker gave a hard, dry little chuckle.

The speaker was Mr. Elias Scardrake. He was unpopularly known amongst those who had dealings with him as “Skinflint,” “Old Cent-per-Cent,” and a dozen other titles as complimentary, but not quite as suitable for ears polite.

He was not really “old”—indeed, he was little beyond the prime of life ; but he was hoary in iniquity—a veteran in villainy. He had in his time had a finger in a good many lines of

business, and he touched nothing that he did not dishonour.

He was one of those objectionable people who begin life with three-halfpence. Of his birth and parentage I don't think he knew any more than I do. The phrase that he began life with three halfpence seems to imply that at some particular period of his youth he became suddenly conscious at once of his existence and of his possession of that specified sum. His first earnings were made by serving a writ—a duty which he performed so far to his employer's satisfaction, that he was retained in the office as half-clerk, half-messenger, and whole doer-of-dirty-work in the pettifogging legal line.

By honest industry—or industrious dishonesty—he in time scraped together a little money, which he lent at exorbitant interest. By degrees he rose in the favour of his master, who, himself a dubious honour to his profession, having been struck off the rolls more than once for dishonest practices, could not but admire the superior scoundrelism of his subordinate. “Scardrake,” he used to say, “is the keenest and sternest blade I ever met. He'd take the shoes off a dead man's feet and issue a writ against a beggar's last

tooth, sooner than not get something out of 'em. You can't escape him ; if you owed him money, and died in the hope of cancelling the debt, I do believe he'd put in a distress, and let your grave on a building lease, but he'd get his rights. Oh, he's a real genius is Scardrake ! ”

It was a pretty true picture. Scardrake was merciless, unscrupulous, implacable. He had laid the foundations of his fortune in the large provincial town of Spincaster, and though the connection he still kept up with it was but slight indeed, he was hated there with one consent. If you wanted to know what he was like, you had only to say to a Spincaster man, “Do you know a Mr. Scardrake ? ” and he would tell you as many disgraceful anecdotes of the scamp as you could spare hours to listen. He would tell you how he had never been known to show a grain of pity or a spark of gratitude to any one. He would tell you how, one day, as he was coming to London, the newspaper-boy at Dernham gave him by mistake a half-sovereign instead of a sixpence in change, and, discovering his error, implored Scardrake to return the money ; how Scardrake refused, and laughed at the poor fellow's pleading ; and how the

wretched lad hung on the step of the carriage after the train started, in the vain hope of moving Scardrake to relent; and, trying to jump off when the motion had grown too rapid, fell under the wheels and was cut to pieces. "Old S. was pretty nearly lynched," your informant will add, "and had to call to the guard for protection." He "got it" from the coroner at the inquest, and had to be protected from the court by a strong body of police; but he didn't care. He was frightened—not repentant. Or your provincial friend will tell you how the splendid diamond-ring that Scardrake wears belonged to an unfortunate client who was going through the Bankruptcy Court; and, how, as he was going before the Commissioner, Scardrake told him that the ring, which was a valuable heirloom, would be taken from him if seen, and offered to take charge of it; and how, after the examination was over, he refused to restore it, and had kept it ever since.

Scardrake had married a client, an invalid lady, with a large fortune. Rumour attributed her death, which took place within two years of her marriage, to some vile practice of Scardrake's, and there was a talk of exhuming the body and examining it for traces of poison.

But Scardrake carried things with a strong hand, and prosecuted the proprietor of a small local paper in which the report was hinted at. He had the case transferred to London (for no Spincaster jury would have found the verdict for him), and the defendant was cast in heavy damages. It made people a little more careful how and where they spoke of him, but it did not make them love him a bit the more.

He had had no family by his wife, but soon after their marriage he made her adopt a girl who was said to be an illegitimate child of his own. His wife, not unnaturally, had no warm affection for the child, but Scardrake was very fond of her. It was the only tender place in his heart, his regard for the little girl; and even that had a suspicion of selfishness about it. He was proud of having risen from nothing, proud of the money he had made, and the position he took, and it was a bitter thought to him that he had no representative to inherit after him.

There would have been no useful result if the body of his wife had been exhumed and examined, as was proposed; for, though Scardrake certainly caused her death, it was by means that were beyond the reach of a *post-mortem*. A bruised spirit and a broken heart

reveal no traces of violence to the eye of a surgeon. The most minute analysis, the most searching chemical test, will not detect traces of the malignant cruelties that poison peace of mind.

Scardrake, as I have said, was, among other nefarious trades, a money-lender ; and his terms may be guessed from the nickname of "Cent.-per-Cent.," which they had earned for him. He was impervious to any such scorn as could be conveyed in a nickname. "What if I do lend at cent.-per-cent.,—who wouldn't do the same if he could ? I don't ask 'em to come to me. They know my terms. I never deceive 'em on that point, or lead them to expect anything but strict business ; and if they choose to come and borrow of me they must abide by the agreement. There's no humbug about me."

Among Scardrake's clients was the manager of "The Royal," the principal theatre at Spincaster. Like all provincial theatres, "The Royal" fluctuated much and often in prosperity. Its highest success was scarcely anything more than the clearing of all expenses. Its lowest decline was irretrievable bankruptcy. It had ruined dozens of people, but there was always an enterprising individual ready to come forward and fill up the gap, almost before his predecessor had filed his schedule.

Talk of the heroism of the British soldier, who steps into the place that a shot has just left vacant in the ranks! Look at the devotion of theatrical speculators! It seems as if it were a national crime to allow a theatre anywhere to remain closed, and these self-sacrificing Curtiuses fling themselves into the gulf without hesitation for the credit of the drama.

The particular Curtius who got into Scardrake's clutches took his leap into Basinghall Street with more than the usual celerity. Scardrake found himself, as it were, compelled to carry on the theatre. His victim had advised him to do so. "If any one can ever make 'The Royal' pay," he said bitterly, "it's you, Mr. Scardrake. If it was squeezing gold out of flint stones, I believe you've the grip to do it. You'd better take it and carry it on."

Scardrake did take it and carry it on; though he gave out that he was doing so for a client who could not appear in the matter, but who had put too much money into it to be able to afford to let it go. He knew if he announced that it was his own speculation, not a soul in Spincaster would come near it.

He ruled with a tight fist, as you may suppose. They declared in the green-room that before his policy of starvation salaries

and frequent fines, the very fleas—without which, as the advertisements say, no theatre can be considered complete—had fled in consternation. He managed—thanks to his legal training—to entrap London “stars” into engagements that turned out less profitable than they looked on paper.

To the astonishment of every one, he made the place pay. And now that he had tasted blood, he began to like the work. He dabbled extensively in theatrical speculations, and took a London theatre; whereupon he left Spincaster and came up and settled in London.

He was not long in acquiring in the metropolis the same kind of notoriety he had obtained in Spincaster. He was soon known as one of the most greedy of the voracious tribe of money-lenders. Even the tribe of Shylock was distanced by this Christian usurer. It was during his early career at Spincaster, and on his first arrival in London, that he had known Clayter, when that unfortunate gentleman's marriage had thrown him among theatrical people. Clayter's first wife, the dancer, had held an engagement at Scardrake's theatre, and it was rumoured that he had been among her admirers; for Scardrake was very susceptible, and in his selfish, animal way, loved a

pretty face dearly. His shameless intrigues were not the least of the bitter wrongs that shortened his wife's existence.

It was, perhaps, some lingering remains of the old secret rivalry that made him sneer as he read the announcement of Clayter's marriage—not that there is any necessity to seek for a motive for his sneer, since to sneer was a part of his nature. “Old Clayter married again!—he! he!” and he chuckled with fiendish delight.

At this moment there was a knock at the door, which, on his snapping out “Come in!” was opened by his clerk.

“Capting Elwin, if ye please, sir.”

“Ask him in.”

The clerk ushered in a pale, dissipated-looking young man, who shook hands languidly with the usurer and sank into a chair.

Herbert Elwin was well connected. He was cousin to an earl, and heir-presumptive to a handsome property. He held a commission in a crack Dragoon regiment, and was discounting his health, as well as his prospects, at the rapid rate at which young men about town live.

He was deeply involved in Scardrake's meshes, but that wily old spider showed no

signs of pouncing upon him—just as a veritable arachnoid refrains from showing himself in all his grimness until his winged prey has fluttered itself so inextricably into the toils, that the convulsive struggle which his appearance must inspire cannot release it from the web.

Scardrake had his schemes for the disposal of this giddy young fly that had blundered into his reach. He was going to try and entrap him for his daughter; for since he had come to reside in town, he no longer called Esther his adopted child. So he never refused a loan to Elwin, and was always ready to renew, or do anything to oblige him. All that he stipulated for was the pleasure of the Captain's acquaintance.

"Our relations, Captain Elwin," he used to say, "are not business relations. I do this for you as a friend—I couldn't do it on such terms otherwise. Come and dine with us to-morrow in a quiet way. I want your opinion of some burgundy I have been buying—say yes!"

And the Captain said yes. He saw that Scardrake was really proposing a bargain—money on easy terms in exchange for the honour of intimate friendship with an earl's cousin. He set it down to snobbishness, and suspected him of no ulterior object. Meanwhile the old

usurer was biding his time. He threw Esther in the Captain's way, and only waited until the spendthrift was sufficiently under the thumb to begin turning the screw.

That time was approaching, for Esther was getting of a marriageable age. She was worthy of her father and her bringing up. She was as hard as iron. There were no young-lady fancies about her. She was accomplished, because she must be accomplished just as she must be well dressed—not from any taste for either finery or accomplishments, but because they were necessary for one who was to occupy a good position in society. She had early learnt that lesson from her father, and her most romantic dream was that of keeping a carriage! If you want a finishing touch to this sketch of her, accept it in this fact: she never had a pet! No cat—no dog—not even a canary ever called Esther mistress, or looked to her for food or favour.

Although she was not told of the crafty schemes by which her father was planning to secure Captain Elwin, there was a sort of tacit understanding about the matter. She knew that Scardrake brought him to the house with no other object than that she should fascinate him. She did her best to do so, but there was

a snaky way with her that was not very prepossessing.

Elwin was civil to her—more than civil, for she even was more agreeable company than her father—and as he was compelled to visit them, he was rather grateful to her for making the infliction lighter by her presence.

On the occasion of his present call at Scar-drake's chambers, Captain Elwin was not altogether easy in his mind. I have said he was presumptive heir to considerable property. Its present possessor was a bachelor uncle, who had attained an age when the heir might be pretty presumptive that he would not marry. But there is no limit to the folly of man and the weakness of old bachelors. Elwin had just been warned by some of his uncle's people, who thought it good policy to ingratiate themselves with their possible master, that the old gentleman was in some peril of matrimony. A damsel, who, they declared, was capable of committing matrimony of the most aggravated description, had set her cap at the old boy, and he showed an inclination to surrender at indiscretion.

Elwin wished to rush down to his uncle and try to put the enemy to flight. He was, as usual, short of funds, but he was anxious be-

yond that to arrange with Scardrake for the renewal of certain bills that were likely to fall due during his absence. But he never hinted at the reason of his visit to his uncle, for fear Scardrake in alarm should stop the supplies, or demand payment.

Scardrake was all compliance. "Money? To be sure he would advance money. Renew? Of course he would renew with pleasure. Wouldn't Elwin come and dine with him? There was that Madeira he liked so—there wasn't much left of it."

Elwin could not but accept. He could go down to his uncle's next day, and it was well to be as obliging as possible to Scardrake.

They had a cosy little dinner at Scardrake's. The old rogue had a handsome villa at Norwood, and lived like a fighting cock.

"Yes, I've bought it, my dear Elwin, and laid out the grounds, and furnished it in the best style. Not that I care about it myself, for I've been glad of an attic in my time, and quite contented there. But it's for my dear girl's sake. I shall leave it all to her at my death, or give it up before that, if she is married. Ah, she'll be a treasure, whoever gets her, and I wish her to have all the com-

forts she has been accustomed to. You see I don't want a man with money for her—I want a gentleman for my son-in-law. The education I have given her has fitted her for a more exalted sphere than the humble one in which I move. My only wish is to see her married, and then I shall retire to my natural position, content to watch from a distance my darling child adorning society, which I am not fitted, nor do I wish, to intrude myself upon."

"That's the way of the wind," thought Elwin to himself, as the usurer cunningly gave him this look at his hand. "By Jove, there might be worse things to be done, if one were cornered."

So he was very attentive to Esther that evening, which rejoiced the heart of that bitter virgin exceedingly.

Scardrake was in high spirits that night, as he shook hands with his meditated son-in-law.

"Going down into the country, eh?"

"Yes, I'm compelled to go—family reasons, you know. Visit to my uncle—I must go and see him now and then."

"Well, I suppose your stay will not be a very long one?"

"I can hardly say, he's such an odd old boy."

"At any rate, you'll come to see us as soon as you return. In a week or so, at latest, I suppose!"

"Oh, yes, not more. Good night."

"Good night, Captain Elwin—good night."

The Captain's visit to his uncle was shorter than he expected. He was back in town again the next night.

The first greeting which he received from his uncle dissipated his visions of heirdom to the winds.

"Glad to see you, Herbert, my boy," said the old gentleman, "you'll be in time to be groomsman. Yes, I've made up my mind it's time for a gay young dog like me to settle. Yes, married, my lad! There's no fool like an old fool."

"I don't think there is," said Herbert Elwin, bitterly; and thereupon ensued a coolness between him and his uncle: and the Captain, when he bade the old gentleman good-night, made it good-bye too; saying he was sorry he could not stop for the wedding, but that he was obliged to join his regiment without delay.

There was some excuse for his feeling strongly. It was simply ruin to him. No sooner would his uncle's marriage be known

than his creditors would swoop on him without mercy. Scardrake he could hardly expect to be less exacting; for he felt that, though the rascal had declared he did not want money for his daughter, that could scarcely be taken to mean that he would accept a beggar or a bankrupt.

There was only one ray of light that he could see. He would consult the family solicitors. There might be something snatched out of the fire on his uncle's hymeneal altar. At any rate, they might suggest some harbour of refuge.

So he hurried back to town by the first train in the morning, and paid a visit to Messrs. Uvedale and Metford.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEREIN THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO MRS.
CAPTAIN HASSARD.

WHEN the Clayters were once safely off on their wedding-tour, gallant Jack Hassard resolved to lose no time in pressing his suit for Mary's hand. The position he had held as Clayter's right-hand-man gave him the *entrée* at "The Yews," and had commended him to Aunt Chippin.

To do Clayter justice, I do not think he would have given honest Jack such opportunities and aids for prosecuting his matrimonial scheme had he observed that the gallant officer was paying court to Mary. But he was so wrapt up in his own love affairs that the usual selfishness begot of such circumstances completely blinded him to what was going on under his very nose. But there can be no doubt that by making Jack his confidant and go-between—and especially by that little dodge about the

bridal veil—he was of material assistance to the Captain in disarming the suspicions which Aunt Chippin at one time felt with regard to his attentions to Mary.

“He can’t be anything bad, if he is such a very intimate friend of dear Mr. Clayter’s,” argued she to herself; “and he must be well off too, or he would never have given Laura such a magnificent present as that veil. Mary might do worse—at any rate, we’ll wait till he proposes, and then we can see what he is like.”

So honest Jack Hassard was allowed to make frequent calls—to inquire if they had heard from the happy pair, or upon any other plea. As often as not, he saw only Mary, for Aunt Chippin had to undergo a good deal of repair of a morning, especially since she had taken to going out with her nieces into society. For her the swift dromedaries sped over the arid desert laden with waters from the Fountain of Youth, situate in a grove of palms in the very heart of the Great Sahara. For her the learned Jewess gathered the early dew, expressed the juices of various flowers, and went in generally for a magical cauldron, *à la* Medea. Aunt Chippin, in short, was one of the clients of the Hebrew enchantress who professed to have the secret of making woman “beautiful for ever.”

If she did possess that secret, at any rate she never exercised it on Aunt Chippin's behalf, possibly because, Aunt Chippin's means being limited, she could not afford to purchase the great gift of renewed youth, and had to be satisfied with some minor redecoration. Anyhow, Aunt Chippin was never made "beautiful for ever." Laura even said that the result of the process was to make her "uglier than ever"—but Laura was a nasty satirical thing, as Mary said when her sister made this mild joke to her in private.

Aunt Chippin did not keep a lady's maid, so she had to execute her own repairs, and the process was rather a tedious one. So Jack used to have long *tête-à-têtes* with Mary, while the old lady was stopping her wrinkles, raddling her cheeks, and supplementing her scanty locks with false wool.

Captain Jack blessed the old lady's vanity, and made the most of his time. He had early discovered that Mary was a romantic and sentimental goose, and he supplied stuffing for the goose with a liberal hand. He brought his guitar and taught her how to play it. He showed her how to wear a mantilla. He instructed her in the Bolero, and gave her lessons in the art of wielding a fan. And then he told

her anecdotes of his military career in Spain—and, oh my gracious, what lies he did tell! He was Oliver and Roland rolled into one, “with which was incorporated” a good deal of Charlemagne, the whole profusely illustrated by the virtues and bravery of King Arthur and all the knights of the Round Table.

Mary listened to him always with thorough faith in all he said, and enjoyed his stories with the most intense delight. Nor did Jack himself fail to be pleased with his own inventive powers. He loved lying for lying's sake, and at the same time he, in a sort of way, believed what he was saying—to this extent, that is—namely, that even if these wonderful events had not happened, they might have happened, and he might have been the hero he described himself. And there was some ground for his belief; for, as I have already said, he was possessed of any amount of brute courage—the instinct of courage, that is, not the courage of reason, which is a higher thing. He would have charged a battery single-handed, not because it was his duty to do so, or because his honour would not allow him to hold back—not, in short, from any of the elevated motives which make men heroic in spite of themselves, but because it was his nature to do such things without thought of consequences,

just as it is the nature of a bull-dog to tackle a bull, and hang on.

No, it was not courage that was required to make Hassard the mirror of chivalry which he described himself to be. He lacked the virtues, not the bravery, of Sir Galahad; and would have let slip the chance of succouring distressed damsels, or redressing human wrongs,—or any other of the noble acts enjoined by the laws of the Round Table—if any chance of plunder had offered itself.

“If the worst comes to the worst, Jack Hassard,” said that worthy to himself, observing with what intense interest Mary was listening to one of his stories—“if the worst comes to the worst, you might make your fortune by writing romances for a weekly paper. I know the dodge—‘just at this moment, when the captain’s sword was suspended over his foeman’s head, a loud report was heard. To be continued in our next’—that’s the style.”

And then he went on describing to poor Mary how he had single-handed defended a nunnery in which a number of ladies had taken refuge.

“There was only one gateway, luckily, and it was surrounded by lofty walls. The entrance was through a sort of lodge, which would only hold three or four people, and the door was so

small that it would only admit one at a time. I pistoled the first two fellows that came in, and they fell in their tracks just in the doorway—a very good job for me, since they blocked it up a good deal, and were in the way of the other fellows as they came on. The next rascal I cut down, but presently a couple of them forced their way in, and I had my work to do to manage the pair of them. There was one advantage, however, in it—their friends outside couldn't fire for fear of hitting either of them. Seeing, however, a third fellow coming in with the pleasing design of bayonetting me, I made short work of the two. It was only just in time, for, before I could put myself on the defensive, he ran me through the sword-arm. However, I could use my sword just as well with my left, and my doing so puzzled the beggar, so that he gave me an opportunity of running him through, which I did, and then I was just in time to cut down another; and then the rascals hung back a bit, shouting out to shoot 'the English devil'—very flattering, wasn't it?"

"And did they hit you?" asked Mary.

"Well, I didn't give them the chance, though they were very poor marksmen. You see there was a sort of loop-hole on each side of the gate,

so I just stepped behind the wall, and kept a look-out through the narrow opening to see if any more would try to force an entrance. So, after firing away for a little while without doing any harm, except to the plaster on the opposite wall, they gave up the attempt to carry the place by storm, and tried to blow us up. They put a slow match into a barrel of powder, and then some of them volunteered to make a rush, and fling it into the entrance. But I was too quick for them. Before they got near the door I fired at the barrel, and exploded it with terrific effect. Just then a regiment of our hussars came up, and charged them, putting almost all of them to the sword."

"How glad you must have been to see them," said Mary.

"Well, I must confess I was, for the wound in my arm was very painful, and I had lost so much blood that I must have fainted soon; and then, of course, there would have been an end of Jack Hassard, for they would have bayoneted me, or blown my brains out as I lay, for they had no mercy on the wounded."

"Oh, how shocking!"

"That was the nearest touch for my life I ever had. I was laid up in the nunnery with my wound for ten days, and at one time they

did not think I should get over it. Perhaps it would have been as well if I had not," he added, sinking his voice, and investing its deep manly tones with a profound melancholy.

"Oh, don't say so, Captain Hassard. Think how many friends would have regretted you"——

"Friends, Miss Mardale," he said solemnly, shaking his head; "a poor broken-down soldier of fortune has few friends. I don't believe there is a single soul who would give a moment's thought of regret if I were shot to-morrow, and shovelled into the shallow, blood-stained trench that forms a soldier's grave."

"Oh yes, indeed, indeed, we should all miss you so very much. I am sure I can answer for that!"

"Ah, Miss Mardale, if I could hope that my fate—the fate of one so unfortunate and so humble as I am—could interest *you*, life would still hold out some comfort to me."

Mary held down her head and blushed. She felt that now or never the long-wished-for declaration must come.

"No!" said the Captain, after a pause, "your kindness leads you to speak thus, but you cannot really feel"——

Mary raised her head and gave him a look that spoke volumes. The Captain took her hand, and she made no effort to withdraw it.

"Miss Mardale—Mary—dearest girl. Your silence gives me visions of a happy future—inspires me with a new desire for life. Do I interpret it aright? May I hope—may I venture to dream that you are not entirely indifferent to my worship—my devotion?"

"Oh, no, Captain Hassard—indeed I regard you as a dear friend."

"Give me a claim to some nearer place, some dearer title than that. Mary, I love you."

Mary gave a half sigh, half sob, at those delightful words. The Captain drew her towards him, and planted a kiss upon her forehead. Then suddenly he started back, and drew his hand hastily across his eyes.

"What have I done? Alas, carried away by my ardent affection, I have dared to seek your love, to engage your heart in the fortunes of one who is but a broken-down soldier, without a position, without money! Is this honourable, Jack Hassard? Is it manly?"

"Do not reproach yourself thus," said Mary, coming to him and taking his hand; "what is money, what is rank, what is anything in the world to those who really—love!" and she

uttered that last word in a sort of whisper, after a brief hesitation, so that it was amply emphasized.

"Angel of goodness"—and Jack gave her another hug—"I will try to deserve you—I will work for your sake—I will toil—slave—do anything that is not unbecoming a soldier and a gentleman! You shall yet be mine."

"Those who love can wait," said Mary, unwittingly quoting from the last novel she had been reading.

"I fear if we say a word to your aunt she may forbid me the house—she would be justified in so doing, for such a treasure as my Mary is worthy of some one better than such a poor, penniless old soldier as I am!"

"Yes, Aunt Chippin must not know our secret—she thinks me too young to think of marriage as yet!"

Mary felt that, from what she had heard of Aunt Chippin's views of matrimony, the very thing which lent her lover an additional charm in her own eyes—his poverty—would be an insuperable objection in those of her relative. Mary Mardale was, as has been said before, a sentimental goose, or she would never have considered her lover's poverty a charm in his favour. The fact was that she did not in the

least realise what poverty meant. Her notion of it was that, instead of living in a mansion like Claytersville, they would dwell in a little cottage covered with roses and honeysuckles ; that, instead of having champagne they would drink table-beer ; and that they would dine off a plain joint and potatoes instead of banqueting on French *entrées* and made-dishes. Poverty to her meant Britannia metal spoons and forks, instead of real silver ; a pony and basket carriage, instead of a carriage and pair ; a fortnight at Margate, instead of a couple of months at Brighton—in short, her ideal of poverty was a sort of poverty that very few of us would object to being afflicted with. She had no visions of two quarters' rent in arrear, with no prospect of getting the money to pay it ; of the butcher's bill so overdue and oversized that Mr. Brisket " would be glad if you could settle his small account "—and won't send in any more meat till you do. The idea of empty pockets and an empty larder never occurred to her as the real meaning of poverty. The poverty she pictured to herself was as much poverty as the long jingling green purse, that the villain of a melodrama flings to his myrmidon, is wealth.

But Jack Hassard was not troubled with any such erroneous views, and he guessed that Aunt

Chippin would also have some practical ideas on the subject. He had seen that the settlements had been pretty sharply looked after in Clayter's case, and he felt that his suit would break down when it came to a question of that kind.

There was only one way to avoid the difficulty, and that was to prevail on Mary to marry clandestinely; and he argued rather hopefully that her romantic notions would induce her to consent to such a step more readily. He felt that when once they were married Aunt Chippin might be talked over, and would not allow her niece to want.

He went about his scheme very cautiously. He did not propose it all at once to Mary, but "supposed" and "only fancied" how happy they would be if they were only married, and related stories of people who had been secretly married, and lived happily ever afterwards.

But at last a time came when it was necessary to put his plans in execution with as little delay as possible. The Clayters were on their way home. Jack had read Laura's character, and he knew she would not hear of Mary's marrying him; nor did he think Clayter would be very desirous of the connection.

So he broached his plot to Mary, urging her

to become his wife, and pointing out to her the danger of a separation, if her sister and her husband returned and discovered their attachment.

Mary made some objections, but I don't think she felt them. She was charmed at the notion of so romantic a marriage. So after a pretence of resistance she consented.

Jack gave up his lodgings over the news-shop, and took a small cottage at Walworth, having no difficulty in finding respectable references among those acquaintances, who thought him a nobleman in embryo. It was not a large place, and the furniture was old and shabby, but still the rent was much higher than the Captain could have hoped to pay—that is, supposing he ever gave a thought to the matter.

By dint of a good deal of billiards, and by getting a few trifling loans from his friends, the Captain contrived to buy a special license and make all the necessary arrangements.

So one morning Mary put on her bonnet and went out for a morning's shopping, though it set Aunt Chippin wondering to discover why she should have been crying, and what



on earth could make her kiss her so demonstratively as she went out.

"That fool of a girl has been snivelling over some idiotic novel again," said the old lady. "I declare I've a great mind to forbid her to read such trash."

Mary's shopping occupied some time. She was late for lunch, but Aunt Chippin never waited for any one. She was finishing off the edge of a very respectable appetite, for a woman of her age, with a slight refection in the shape of cold bread-and-butter pudding, when the door opened and her niece returned, accompanied by Captain Hassard.

There was something in their looks that set Aunt Chippin wondering. Before she had got over her bewilderment sufficiently to ask any questions, the couple were on their knees before her—this was arranged by Mary, who knew it was always done by runaway couples in novels, confessing their sins and asking forgiveness.

Aunt Chippin was speechless. When the two culprits urged as an excuse for their act, that they feared the Captain's poverty might have induced her to forbid their union, the irrevocable folly of her niece was revealed to her. She could not find words for a few

moments, so furious was her indignation. At last she got her voice back—she rose from her chair, pushed it back with a crash, and saying with intense rage, “ You two fools ! ” bounced out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARRIED FOR MONEY.

AND now, if you please, gentle reader, you must consider a period of some years to have elapsed between the time when I rang down the act-drop upon that telling situation in the last chapter, and this present moment when it is raised again, to show the further action of the drama.

There is open house kept now at Claytersville. Mrs. Clayter has her receptions every Wednesday, and contrives to get very good people about her. She has devoted all her time, all her energies, and a good deal of the money with which her husband so lavishly supplies her, to effecting this end. She is an indefatigable huntress of lions, and always contrives to allure the last new traveller, the last new poet, the last new commercial prince—the last new sensation, in short, of any kind, for her crowded *soirées*.

She rises late and languidly, just in time to

take her airing in the park, where her barouche and pair of bright bays are well known and favourably criticised by the knowing ones. She has a pleasant way, and is very popular, especially among the men. For one thing, she is so free from what those youths define as "somethinged" nonsense. She stands on no ceremony, and is pretty sure to ask some one or other to "come down and take a little dinner with us to day—only ourselves, you know—take us as we are—quite *en famille*!" As she does not show any preference in this matter, but takes them all in turn, she is beyond the reach of scandal, which would otherwise gladly have made her pay for her popularity.

Clayter's *chef* has his hands pretty full now-a-days, you may be sure; for, though madam talks so about the quiet family dinner she invites you to share, she knows that a sumptuous feast is awaiting her.

She has her opera box of course, and as Clayter hates the opera—he had had a sickener of it as a young man—she asks her guest to accompany her—in fact, invited him to dinner with that view privately in her mind. Of course he is only too charmed, not that he cares for the music any more than Clayter

does, but because it's the correct thing to be fond of the opera.

The theatres, too, are considerably patronised by Mrs. Clayter on the evenings when there is no opera. She seldom misses a flower-show, or a fancy fair, and never misses a concert at the Crystal Palace. Her lawn-parties are the talk of Brixton, and her evenings the envy of all her female friends and acquaintances.

She had ripened and broadened into a handsome matronly woman. She set off to advantage the magnificent dresses and resplendent jewellery she wore. "Doosid fine woman, Mrs. C.!" was the verdict of the men. The women were not so flattering in their estimate of her charms: but no woman ever forgives another the possession of any pretensions to good looks, so that a woman's opinion of a woman must be judged rather by the spirit than by the letter. Thus, "a dear good soul!" means a lady plain enough to allow her virtues to be seen; whereas "a very peculiar person" means one who has the audacity to be good-looking.

Aunt Chippin had not survived long to see the splendours of her eldest niece. She died rather suddenly, leaving nothing behind her but some empty Sahara-water bottles, a little

rouge, and a few powder puffs. She lies in Brixton churchyard, not very far from that enormous monument (at the point furthest from the church), whose huge bulk irresistibly compels one to think that it was placed on the lamented gentleman's grave to make it impossible for him to come back and disturb his surviving relatives, heirs, administrators, executors, and assigns. Laura Clayter erected a small headstone over her aunt's grave, inscribed with her name and age. The only epitaph the old lady had was uttered by her loving niece, who said "it was very obliging of the old lady to expire when she did, as it would have been excessively inconvenient if she had done so in the height of the season." Society and a life of gaiety and fashion had not softened Laura's heart, you see.

"But," you may very fairly ask, "how about Clayter all this time?"

Well, to tell you the truth, Clayter is nobody now! His wife was not slow in letting him understand his position, and asserting her own.

He was the least regarded person in his own house—a necessary incumbrance. All his old associates who used to share his snug dinner parties were snubbed into oblivion by his wife. "My dear," she would say, "when

you consider the society we move in, I cannot understand how you can think of having those horrid old vulgarians here! It is quite impossible; but look here, my dear, if you find pleasure in their company, take them to Richmond or Greenwich. Make it a Wednesday, and you can have the brougham, and you can stay as late as you like, as they don't leave my evenings very early."

Clayter's cob and his natty groom were things of the past now. The stable was required for those spanking bays of his wife's, and there was a portly coachman to drive them, with a tall footman, powdered as to his head, and padded, perhaps, as to his calves, to sit beside him on the box.

It was a fortunate thing that, owing to the death of a cousin, Clayter had come into a large property, for it enabled Mrs. C. to launch out in a style beyond her fondest hopes at the time of her marriage. She had, up to this time, been compelled to rest contented with one horse and a brougham, and a man who was coachman and footman in one, ranging from stable to table, and attending to horses and courses by turns.

Poor Clayter! He was really attached to his wife at first, and was proud of her to the

last. But she disillusioned him without mercy, almost as soon as the honeymoon was over. He had ventured to express a wish that she would not give so many parties; he longed for home comfort, and a quiet *tête-à-tête* with his darling Laura. Whereupon his darling Laura promptly asked him if he thought it was for any such silly nonsense as that that she had married a man of his years? It was a sore blow to the old buck's vanity—a cruel pang to the doting husband's real love for his wife.

From that time he accepted his position without a murmur; possibly he felt that he had been an old fool, and deserved his fate. He ceased to paint and pad, he discarded his stays and his hair dye; but, upon my word, I think he looked rather younger instead of older in consequence.

But as time went on he grew careless; he dressed in a slovenly way, and took no pride in his appearance. His wife declared she would not allow him to show himself at her evenings if he did not present a more respectable figure. He preferred to be excluded, and used to steal away to spend the evening with his old cronies; or, failing old cronies, in the parlour of some tavern. That was, of course, the beginning of a descent to mere toying. You would not

have believed that this old man with the shaky hand and the tremulous underlip, with the heavy red complexion and the tangled grey hair, had once been dapper old Clayter, for whom all the beauty of Brixton had been ready to pull caps !

Down, down, by sure if slow degrees. He had plenty of money, and so never "wanting the bottle to give him," he never "wanted a friend," if I may apply the term to any one who could sit and see the poor old fellow become soddened with drink, and then leave him to grope his devious road home.

Mrs. Clayter never saw her husband in this sad state but once. She then gave instructions to the housekeeper never to allow her to behold such an odious spectacle again. She had a room on the ground-floor fitted up as a bedroom, and gave orders that he was to be conveyed thither and put to bed whenever he was guilty of such disgraceful conduct.

"My dear Laura," said Mary one day, when she was visiting her sister, "he will drink himself to death !"

"So much the better," said Mrs. Clayter. "I only wish he wouldn't make such a slow affair of it !"

If any one had wanted a nether millstone of

more than ordinary durability, I know where he might have applied !

And what did Society think of this ?

Very little, indeed, so long as Mrs. Clayter gave good parties, and drove a good pair in the park.

“ We never see Mr. Clayter,” Mrs. Scanmag would say to Mrs. Lybelle ; “ what is he ? ”

“ Oh, I think he’s in business, or something. You know the poor thing married a very old man, and he doesn’t care for Society. She’s very much to be pitied, you know.”

And then the two amiable creatures would wag their heads, and kill the “ poor thing’s ” character as far as they could by innuendoes, and hints, and sneers !

No ! Provided she didn’t actually descend to the vulgar course of murdering her husband in a way that rendered her amenable to the law, Society had no quarrel with Mrs. Clayter—or with her evenings, or her dinners, or any anything that was hers. When did it ever refuse to drink the champagne of “ great A,” whose colossal fortune was amassed by robbing the widow and the orphan, or to sip the sherry of “ little A,” who floated many a bubble company, and swam ashore from it, a very “ warm ” rat before it broke up and went

down with all hands? Or when did it decline to feast with "Bouncing Big B," whose profitable delinquencies were so patent that it must have been aware of them, unless it was like the cat in the nursery rhyme—"in the cupboard," and so couldn't see! And indeed its love for "Bouncing Big B" had much of the cupboard about it—that there's no doubt of!

But was Laura happy?

That is a question not altogether easy to answer. She was happy, if happiness might be argued from the ring of her laugh—a genteel laugh, not a vulgar guffaw—or from the sparkle of her eyes, when her rooms were crowded, and all vied in paying homage to the handsome hostess whose hospitality was so lavish and so graceful. She was happy, if the best pair of horses in the park, the best *chef* in London, the best box in the opera, can confer happiness. She was happy, in short, if money can command happiness.

Unfortunately it does not! You can't go to Covent Garden and order it to be sent in like hot-house pines, or green peas at a guinea a peck. You can't go to your wine merchant, and, giving him a check on Coutts', have a case of it sent in like so much Tokay at a guinea a bottle. You may have a fountain in your

boudoir, with the best otto of rose laid on in constant supply; but you can't do the same with happiness.

Mrs. Clayter might be apparently happy in the midst of all that wealth can purchase—including a crowd of “friends,” so very like the real article that, as the advertisements say, it is “scarcely to be distinguished from silver.”

But in the lassitude of the morning, in the quiet hours of night, in the intervals of the wearying pursuit of pleasure, do you think that this woman's conscience was asleep? Was there no blank in her life—was there no void in her heart, that made her wealth vanity? Let us hope so—if only for her sake; for if it were not so, a corpse animated by a demon would have more of humanity about it than such a woman.

Ah, you may be sure that her haggard, weary eyes ached for the relief of tears often and often, as in the awful darkness of night—the darkness that will not suffer self-delusion or justification—she beheld how lonely and how unreal was the position she had bought at such a price. Her sister almost a stranger, her husband lost to her and to himself, her friends the mere mock of friendship—these

must have been pictures that rose before her with silent rebuke. Like the Egyptian king in Holy Writ, she must have trembled and whispered promises of repentance and reparation "in the morning;" and like him, when the morning came, bright and reassuring, she hardened her heart, and persisted in her wrongdoing.

She had married for money. She got it—and but little beside. But her husband had married for love—and had not got it! Even now, broken-down and besotted as he was, the man retained his affection and admiration for her. He did not remember her neglect and scorn and cruelty, but he maundered about her beauty, and hovered about her, happy to be near her and touch her hand—the hem of her dress—when there was no company. He shrank from that at once, and went off muttering to seek his cronies and the unscrupulous hangers-on, who profited by his weakness and folly.

He was the jest of his tavern companions only too often, when he talked with maudlin sentiment about his wife—"markably hands' wom'! wom' to be prou' of!" Many and many a glass of that vulgar liquid, gin, was raised to grimy sodden lips in her honour—

though luckily without her knowledge, or the shock would have made her ill.

There was one very crumpled rose-leaf in Laura's couch of roses, and it was a fitting retribution, since she could not but feel it was her own fault. After Aunt Chippin's death, "The Yews" became the abode of the son, heir, and successor of the faithless Bresketh, who had so ruthlessly jilted Aunt Chippin. Mr. Bresketh No. 2 was married, and his wife was a fine lady. They were wealthy, and moved in good society, Mr. Bresketh being a member of Parliament.

There arose a tacit rivalry between Mrs. Clayter and Mrs. Bresketh, and fierce indeed was the grim, silent struggle as to which should give the best parties, which should have the finest horses—which, in short, should outshine the other. The contest went on with varying success for a long time; sometimes the victory seemed to declare for Laura, at others for Mrs. Bresketh. But one fatal day gave the latter an advantage which Laura never recovered.

I have said Mr. Bresketh was in Parliament. In his place in the House he had during his whole career voted for his party, to the entire satisfaction of his conscience and his con-

stituents, without once failing—without once opening his mouth to express his own opinions. At last came a crisis. Ministers were bringing in an important bill by which they must stand or fall. One clause in it, it was well known, would be fiercely contested, and the most sanguine of the ministerial party felt that a dissolution was imminent, if not a resignation. It was just at this juncture that “Her Majesty was pleased to confer a baronetcy on Peter Bresketh, Esq., M.P. for Kerruptshire.” That is to say, the First Whip told the Prime Minister that it was time to make their political last will and testament, and set their political house in order before dying a political death; and he further gave in a list of the names of a select body of gentlemen who had always supported the Government, and with whom he felt there was an implied understanding that they should not go unrewarded for their long and tried fidelity.

Great was the elation at “The Yews” when this was announced in the papers; and dire was the wrath at Claytersville. And what made Laura the more angry was that she felt that she had no one to thank but herself that her husband had sunk too low to be of service. She blamed herself for not insisting on his

going into the House. She had driven him to another sort of public house instead of to Parliament.

As Lady Bresketh drove by, with the arms fresh painted on the panels, with the addition of the "red hand" of baronetcy, Laura gnashed her teeth in impotent envy.

She had married for money, but she was not satisfied now she had it. She was grasping after rank, too.

I don't think that the result of her experiment in matrimony is encouraging. Let us see how it fares with the sister who married for love!

CHAPTER IX.

MARRIED FOR LOVE.

MOUNT PLEASANT, which was neither pleasant nor a mount, was a row of mean and dilapidated cottages that once stood near Peckham Rye, in a lane of which, at the time I write, was being absorbed by the spread of the tide of bricks and mortar that has swallowed up so many green fields round London.

It was given up at this time to brick-fields, whose wreaths of white smoke and flickering blue flames one might, in carrying out the tidal metaphor, call the foam and phosphorescence on the utmost verge of the rising wave. As the brick-and-mortar flood comes on and devours the fields, the advanced guard of kilns and clay-pits is pushed further into the country, to be steadily followed up by the main body of newly-built mansions, and so on, until—until when? Why, to all appearance, until London extends from the Land's End to the North Foreland, and from Portsmouth to Berwick-

upon-Tweed, when the only green field will be one preserved among the stuffed animals and other curiosities in the British Museum, and the only fresh air procurable will be laid on in pipes, like our gas and water, and charged for accordingly! Yes; it must come to something of the kind, if the builders go on building at the rate they do now. Nothing seems to check them. Streets and terraces remain "to let" by wholesale, but new streets and terraces continue to spring up. Everybody shakes his head, and says building is a ruinous business—and then goes and builds. A speculative builder converts every shilling he has—and more besides—into bricks and mortar, and finds that his new terrace leads directly to the Bankruptcy Court. "Well, it will teach him a lesson," say you—and within a week after he has passed, you will find him building again! Building, in short, is as catching and as common as small-pox, and like that disease, commits frightful ravages on the fair face of nature.

I am compelled to own that there was no great beauty defaced when the brick-and-mortar epidemic spread to Mount Pleasant. The cottages were picturesque enough, but they owed that to the dilapidations that made them scarcely habitable. It was the picturesqueness

of beggary—that which makes looped and windowed wretchedness more dear to the artistic eye than respectability in spotless broadcloth.

Mount Pleasant had no doubt once upon a time been a genteel enough place, but its owner had either been unable or unwilling to keep it in order. It was a neglected spot. The lane was out of repair, knee-deep in mud in wet weather, and ankle-deep in dust in dry seasons. It was full of holes and ruts. On one side stood a row of small houses, or cottages; on the other a straggling unkempt hedge, with here and there patches of green-sward wide enough to give camp-room to the gipsies, who disputed its possession with the Mount Pleasant pigs and poultry. In the case of the poultry, the gipsies generally ended the dispute by making examples of sundry fowls, by wringing their necks and devouring them. Pigs, being animals that do not allow themselves to be made examples of without vociferous protest, and are not as easily cooked and disposed of as poultry, the gipsies were contented with driving them from the camping-ground with sticks and stones. There was fierce feud between the gipsies and the inhabitants of Mount Pleasant, as may be supposed, but

neither party completely succeeded in gaining the day.

You will have concluded from this description that Mount Pleasant was scarcely the place one would have selected as a residence.

Yet it is in one of these houses that we find Captain Hassard established ! Things had not gone well with the Captain after his marriage ! The landlord of the small cottage at Walworth, to which the Captain had conducted his bride, had been inconsiderate enough to want his rent. He had even gone so far as to threaten legal proceedings, and talked about putting in the brokers. The lofty soul of the Captain was enraged at the low insult, so he quitted the house one dark night without leaving behind him the address to which his letters were to be forwarded. Owing to this oversight, no doubt, he managed to get rid of the persecution of his inconsiderate and rapacious landlord.

Mary was not a woman of business, and she was wanting in the independence and high spirit which her husband possessed. She was weak enough to be shocked at the Captain's mode of changing his residence. Shocks caused by the peculiarities of the Captain had, however, become chronic with her, and she had learnt that it was useless to expostulate with him, for

it only made more bitter an existence which was embittered sufficiently already by a disillusion of the harshest and most cruel kind.

Who can describe the wrath of gallant Captain Hassard, when he found out that he had not married an heiress? You would have fancied that he was a millionaire, entrapped into a union by a designing and unscrupulous woman—that Mary had deceived him, and only wanted his money—to hear how he declaimed against the fraud which had been practised upon him. He never allowed himself to look at the matter in the light of a blunder of his own, or a failure of his intended villainy. He was the guileless victim, not the disappointed speculator, the baffled rogue. Aunt Chippin was a vile designing old cat! How dared she live in such a house, and keep up such a style, when she was really a pauper living in another person's house on sufferance? Old Clayter was either a rogue or a fool, or both, for marrying a woman without any money, and leading the Captain to believe by his silence on the point that she was wealthy. As for Mary, she was a sentimental idiot. She knew she had not a penny—why had she not told him? “Because he had professed to love her for her own sake, and not for money!” Why, she had

nothing, and he had told her he was penniless, and any one but an idiot must have known that it was madness for them to marry.

He did not scruple to say as much to Mary. He took no pains to conceal the fact that he did not care for her, when he found she brought him no money. He reproached her with having ruined him. "She had dragged him down into the mud, and no mistake! While he was single he could get on well enough, and fight his own way—he could have married plenty of women with money. But she was a millstone round his neck, with a vengeance. And what could she do? Read novels and darn stockings—would that keep them?"

You see the Captain was rather an advanced advocate of Women's Rights. He thought women ought to work to keep their husbands.

At first he tried very hard to establish himself as a pensioner on the Clayters. He set Mary to borrow of her sister, and he himself applied to Clayter for loans.

But Laura would not stand that kind of thing long. "My dear Mary," said she, "I'll take care *you* never want, but not one penny-piece do you get out of me for that idle vagabond of a husband." Accordingly hampers of eatables, and presents of clothing for Mary,

came pretty frequently from Claytersville to Mount Pleasant. The Captain regaled on the former, and converted the latter into ready cash, it is true ; but he growled tremendously, all the same. "The grasping harridan might as well have given us the price of the things—one doesn't get half what they cost when one sells them. It's downright robbery and nothing less."

Of course Mary did not dare to let her sister know what became of her gifts, and so she saw but little of her. It would never have done to visit Laura in the shabby old gowns to which her husband's sale of the new dresses restricted her. Laura was scarcely sorry that Mary stayed away, for she had a due horror of her poor relations intruding on the society she kept. Nevertheless, she had a real affection for her sister, and would have been as indignant as pained to know how she was treated, and to what dire straits she was reduced. She would hardly have recognised Mary in the thin, shabbily-dressed, slatternly Mrs. Hassard, who doddered feebly about, and shook like a leaf at every knock at the door.

The Captain had been compelled to make a concession so far as to pretend to be working for his living. As those mythical "people" of

his, who had never "been in trade," and would not "hear of his taking any situation," seemed to hear of his starving with the greatest unconcern, he had determined, he declared magnanimously, to let his family pride go to the devil, and so he would "work"—yes, he would positively "work."

The Captain's notions of work were about as vague, however, as Mary's notions of poverty had been. When he had got some cards printed—

MR. JOHN HASSARD,

(Captain, S.A.)

Commission-Agent.

he appeared to be under the impression that he had entered on a career of arduous labour. He began to talk about "toiling without remuneration," and about "earning his bread with the sweat of his brow." But he never seemed to do anything except loaf at bars and in billiard-rooms, as of old.

I verily believe if you had asked him to solve

a mystery, which I am sure puzzles one half the world, if they would but confess to it—if, in short, you had requested him to explain what a commission-agent is, he could no more have told you than I can !

How the Hassards contrived to live I cannot divine. It is another social mystery (like the employment of commission-agent) of which it is impossible to discover the solution. There is an old saw about a hen that scratches all day long to supply herself with food, and cannot, therefore, do more when she has a brood of chicks to provision. But then the hen starts with this advantage, that the soil she scratches contains the wherewithal to dine. If she were set down in the Sahara, she might scratch till she unburied the Sphinx, and get not even an ant-egg for her pains. In like manner, it seems impossible that a family can be supported on small oblong scraps of card-board inscribed with a name, and the words "commission-agent." Yet I have known a husband, wife, and four children to exist on a blind in a parlour-window, with the word "Office" on it in gilt letters.

Such an existence is, it must be admitted, bare existence, and no more. A besieged garrison that has dined on its own boots for a

fortnight or so would be scarcely expected to look robust or corpulent. People who live on a wire blind bearing the inscription "Office" in gilt letters, somehow don't require to study "Banting on Corpulence;" nor do cards with the mystic legend "commission-agent," seem, even though unglazed, a very fattening diet. Mary Hassard was the shadow of her former self, and even the Captain, who was an old campaigner, and contrived to make the world at large contribute to his keep at every possible opportunity, was not in what a cattle-show judge would consider prime condition.

He was not much at home. He left his wife to cope with the duns who were constantly besetting him. He was obliged to go to "work," and so she was compelled to stand siege, and try to stave off the creditors. That she did so was rather owing to her meek suffering look than to any arguments or eloquence she could employ.

Poor Mary, her life would have been unendurable but for one thing—she had a child. A little girl was born to the Hassards when they had been about a year married, and the love of the mother, flung back, bruised and broken, by the husband, twined and clung about the new blessing.

The Captain did not consider the little stranger a blessing. If it had been a boy there would have been some compensation for it, in the fact that when he was old enough he could be made to work for his father. But a girl was merely an encumbrance when she grew up, and a nuisance while a baby. The Captain's "work" took him out a great deal during the infancy of his daughter. It kept him out at nights even, for he preferred "work" to the "squalling of that cursed brat."

It is to be presumed that the nocturnal labours of a commission-agent are connected with the theatrical world. At any rate about this time Captain Hassard formed the acquaintance of several gentlemen, who wore quaint but not very fashionable garments, who shaved cheeks and chins very closely, and who called one another "dear boy," and frequented a tavern called the Garrick's Head in a court out of the Strand. As a rule, they were unrecognised geniuses, to judge from their own estimate of themselves. They never had the leading business, but they could have done it—if one might believe their assertions—a good deal better than the star, around whom they were compelled to revolve.

Hassard had "seen life" under many aspects,

but this was a new experience. He liked it, and found it was not a very expensive pleasure.

He used to go and sit with his friends in their dressing-rooms, and adjourn to the tavern when the piece was over. He laid himself out to amuse them, and his talk and his experiences were just the thing to please these excitable folk, who live in an atmosphere of gas and sensation. He came to be recognised at several theatres, and had the *entrée* to many dressing-rooms.

His increasing neglect and his frequent absences were a secret grief to poor Mary, who somehow still retained some semblance of her old love for him. When once a woman has bestowed her love upon a man, however unworthy he may prove, though he desert and ill-treat her—nay, perhaps, because, rather than in spite of all this—the affection does not die out, but possesses sufficient tenacity of life to linger in her heart as a pain, where it once dwelt as a delight.

Fortunately she could forget for awhile in the caresses of her babe the coldness of its father. Yet even this comfort was not without its dark shadow. Often would the thought of her child's future wring her heart with mis-giving and anxiety—how terrible I need not

attempt to say when I have told you that at times when the little thing was ill she was half tempted to pray that it might be taken back to its place among the angels.

But the child grew and throve, for the mother stinted herself for her baby often and often. It was a pretty girl, and clever. The cleverness of the father had been transmitted to her, purified and tempered by the better nature of the mother. She was quick and apt, and as she grew up became so engaging that she even won the heart of the Captain.

"Egad, that child is a sharp one—doesn't take much after *you*," he would say to his wife. "She'd make her fortune on the stage!"

"Heaven forbid," said the poor mother, earnestly.

"Pooh, nonsense! a capital profession! Why, she'd make enough in a few years to keep us both comfortably."

"I'd rather beg for her in the streets."

"That's your cursed sentimentality," was the only answer the Captain vouchsafed.

He saw, however, that his wife was strongly opposed to this notion of sending the child on the stage, so he said nothing more on the subject. But he began to take notice of her, and to encourage in her any tastes that seemed

to point towards his plan. He taught her—as he had taught her mother before her—to play on the guitar, and to sing, and to dance the stately Spanish measures. Poor Mary was delighted to see him taking to the child, and never suspected the selfish motives which induced him to teach her these accomplishments. There was a sort of melancholy sentiment—and she had indulged in sentiment too long ever to get rid of a weakness for it—in watching her husband going through all the performances with which he had first made advances on her heart.

It was owing to this sentimentality of Mary's that the child was christened Violet. On the day when the baby was born, the nurse—a homely, good-tempered sort of woman—had bought a bunch of violets of a poor girl at the door as an act of charity, and had put them in a glass of water. Mary took it into her head that the Captain had brought them as a little delicate attention, and the nurse had suffered her to enjoy the mistake. The Captain took no interest in the matter; and so, when the christening came, he never asked why the baby was to be called Violet, and accordingly Violet it was called.

Now when he began to take notice of the

girl, he gave her the Spanish name of Violante. Violet showed great taste for music, and sang very prettily. She was getting a big girl, when she went one day to her Aunt Clayter's with her mother. When Mrs. Clayter heard her sing she was delighted. Unfortunately, Violet could only play the guitar—there was no piano at home.

“Only play the guitar!” said Mrs. Clayter. “Bless me, no one ever plays on those twangling hurdy-gurdies nowadays. She must have lessons on the piano!”

Mary said she intended her to learn “as soon as they could afford it.”

“When will that be? When Hassard takes to working or comes into a fortune—and, as either contingency is very remote, the poor girl's education will be neglected in the meantime. She shall and must learn, and that at once, too—so, say no more about it, for I'll pay for it.”

CHAPTER X.

SUDDEN DEATH.

MRS. CLAYTER kept her promise. She gave the money to pay for Violet's lessons. But the money was too great a temptation for the Captain, though he felt that it would be of immense advantage to Violet, in the profession for which he designed her, to be able to play well. He compromised matters. He hired a jangling old instrument, and Mary had to furnish up her slender knowledge of music to teach her daughter.

"Violante will work hard, I know, and not grudge her father and mother"—he had no need to include the mother, who got none of it—"a little of the money her aunt gives her."

Violet did work hard, and did not grudge the money, for she was too young and inexperienced to see the Captain's selfish greed. But she did not get on as rapidly as Aunt Clayter had expected. Now, Aunt Clayter was a shrewd woman, and she knew the

Captain's character pretty well. Her suspicions were roused. She made inquiry, and compelled her niece to confess the truth.

"The wretch! Fancy his robbing his own child—he'd take the very food out of her mouth if he could, I do believe, the idle selfish scamp!" she said to her sister; and Mary could not conscientiously contradict her.

"You're almost as bad as he is to let him do it," continued Mrs. Clayter.

"What can I do? I daren't say a word!" said Mary, wringing her hands.

"You never had any more spirit than a mouse! But I'm a match for him. Henceforth Violet will come here three times a week, and I will have Signor Scherzo to teach her. It will puzzle that scamp to get any money out of that arrangement."

The Captain cursed his sister-in-law with great earnestness when he heard of this change. He said she was robbing him, but he did not condescend to explain how. Mrs. Clayter had long since forbidden him her house, where he was at first disposed to establish himself on a very friendly, not to say brotherly, footing. He now threatened to forbid Violet's going to Claytersville. "Where her father was not admitted she should not go!"

But Mrs. Clayter put her foot down when this threat was reported to her. She ordered round the carriage, and drove to Mount Pleasant forthwith, and she raised such a storm about the Captain's ears as made them tingle for days.

"You idle vagabond, do you think I'll let you stand in that girl's light, just because I don't choose to have a blackleg and card-sharper at my house to rob my guests? You can hector over your wife if you like, but you can't do it to me. You should have had me for a wife instead of her. 'You had rather not?'—I can quite believe that. I consider that a compliment, mind, not an insult. Now let us understand one another: I am that child's nearest relative and natural protector, if her parents don't do their duty by her. I've spoken to our solicitors, Uvedale and Metford; and I'll apply to Chancery for the care of her, if you dare to say a word!"

This was, I grieve to say, a fib, hatched on the spur of the moment. But it answered its purpose. The Captain's acquaintance with British law was confined to the knowledge of the mode of procedure for the recovery of small debts. He knew Messrs. Uvedale and Metford, for they had prepared Clayter's

marriage-settlements; and being pretty well aware that law was a commodity that people with means could buy and poor people could not, he felt that there was but one course open to him,—to submit with a good grace. He was the more ready to do so, because, when his first fit of fury was over, and he found his threats brought him in no profit, he began to see that his sister-in-law was unwittingly playing into his hands by fitting his daughter for the stage.

So the Captain withdrew his opposition, and a treaty of peace was signed. Violet went three times a week to her aunt's, and progressed rapidly under the tuition of Signor Scherzo. Her aunt had no children of her own, and grew greatly attached to her niece—a fact which the Captain observed, and was not slow to see the advantage of.

Violet was by this time old enough to see and understand the difficulties which surrounded her father and mother. Whether she saw the cause of those difficulties in her father's aversion from honest work I cannot say—probably she did not. But she saw very clearly that they had a hard struggle to live. Why should not she help them? The musical training she was receiving was an excellent one, and would fit her admirably for the duties of a

musical governess. So she devoted herself day and night unwearingly to master the art.

The result it is easy to guess. She had a natural taste for it, and she had a strong motive for application. She needed nothing else save a good master; and she could have had none better than Scherzo, who, if he slurred his work a little when he had a mere "young lady" to hammer the accomplishment into, was an enthusiast when he had to instruct an appreciative pupil in the art.

At length he informed Mrs. Clayter that he could do no more for her niece. It would be sheer robbery to take any further fee under pretence of teaching her.

"I can do nossing more, excep' I begin to learn from *her*"—he pronounced it *hair*—"but I am like ze great Alessander, I could veep zat zere is no more worlds to conkare—nossing more to teesh zat young lady!"

Aunt Clayter was delighted with Violet's progress. She determined to give a great musical evening, at which Violet should come out as a pianiste. She invited her grandest friends, and all the musical people she either did or did *not* know; under the circumstance, she felt she might do so.

Of course Mary must come and witness her



child's triumph. But how about Hassard? That was a difficult point. She could hardly invite his wife without him, so she determined to allow him to make his appearance "on this occasion only." He was pledged in the most solemn way to good behaviour—not because Mrs. Clayter believed in his pledges one bit, but in order to impress on him the penalties she intended to exact if he did not comport himself properly. The chief proviso was that he was not to approach the card party, which, as is always the case at a musical evening, would adjourn early to the card-room and sit late.

The Captain was not aware of the changes that had taken place at Claytersville since he had been ordered off. He discovered them when he went over to sign the articles, so to speak, under which he was to be admitted to the musical evening.

Clayter's old valet was the only relic of poor Clayter's bachelor days now remaining. His sympathies of course were with his master, and the old times before there was a Mrs. C. to rule with a rod of iron. He chanced to meet the Captain on the stairs.

Hassard asked him how his master was, and gathered enough from the few words which

the other ventured to whisper in fear and trembling, to conclude that poor Clayter was in a bad way.

Partly from curiosity, and partly from an instinctive notion that it might turn out to his advantage, the Captain determined to learn more.

"Can't you slip out for a few minutes for a chat?" he asked the man.

"Lor, yes! I can go out to look for 'im."

"Then I'll be waiting at the corner," said the Captain.

The valet joined him before long, and they went into the parlour of the nearest inn, when the old servant told him the whole history of poor Clayter's decline and fall.

"An' in my opinion he's a drinkin' of hisself into the grave, and pooty quick, too," was his peroration.

"Where does he go generally?" asked Hassard.

The old servant named his principal haunts.

That night Captain Hassard devoted to examining those places of resort, and was not long ere he fell in with Clayter.

He was a wreck indeed!

It was early in the evening, and the parlour had no other occupant. Clayter sat huddled

together in an arm-chair, with his feet on the fender, and a glass of spirit and water on the table beside him. He had a long pipe in his mouth, at which he kept sucking and puffing, in utter unconsciousness of the fact that it was not a-light.

He kept peering about him nervously—staring intently at times, and starting and shuddering.

“Well, Clayter,” said the Captain, cheerfully, taking his feverish feeble hand, “how are you? You remember me—Jack Hassard.”

“Are you Jack Hassard?” said Clayter; but he said it mechanically, and was evidently intent on something else.

“Yes, I’m Jack Hassard! Don’t you recollect me?”

“Then—kill it, kill it!” said the poor wretch; and he pointed nervously at the ground close by Hassard’s foot.

“Kill what?” said the Captain.

“Kill it—the beetle! There—close by you? Don’t let it come at me!”

There was not even a shred of tobacco, or a bit of burnt spill on the sanded floor, that Clayter might have mistaken for the insect. The Captain gave a long low whistle to himself. He saw in a moment what was amiss.

"Never mind the beetles," said he; "I've something that will soon drive them away?"

The unhappy man gave a wild laugh, and sprang towards the Captain, clutching his arm and looking eagerly in his face.

"Give it me! give it me! Oh, you'll save my life—do give it me!"

"But you don't remember me!"

"Oh, yes I do—Jack Hassard. Give it me—give it me!"

"I'll go and fetch it presently. But sit down now. I'll see they don't plague you."

"Ah!" said the other, with a horrible shudder, "it's at night at home when I'm all alone. They have eaten through my eyelids—then they will blind me, and get at my brain, and I shall die!" and he started up in terror at the thought, and clung to "Jack Hassard—dear Jack," imploring him to give him what would drive them away.

"You know the rats won't eat them," he said in a whisper. "They all come together in a long line—they come under the door—hundreds of them. The rats won't touch them—they're too good friends for that! I think"—here he sank his voice even lower—"Hush! I think they're devils!"

Hassard was a hard, heartless, unscrupulous

man, but he could not but be affected by such a spectacle as this.

"Doesn't your wife do anything to drive them away?" he asked.

The other gave a melancholy shake of the head.

"She sends them," he hissed in Hassard's ear; "she shuts me up all alone in the room, and they begin to come in under the door. She sends them—she wants me dead! She wants me dead."

There was something terribly desolate and sad in those last words, which he repeated a second time.

"But you'll be revenged on her yet," said the Captain. "We'll drive them away."

"Yes. Revenge! Ha, ha! They don't know about the will in the cabinet in my room. That will astonish them—that will teach her to send those devils in to eat through my eyelids. I tell you I daren't close my eyes at night now, for fear they should be at them. I can feel their crawling legs on me, and all night long I keep sweeping them off my face. But I can't kill them."

I need not prolong this painful scene. The Captain made an excuse to go into the bar, where he got a spoonful of salt, and wrapped it up in paper, giving it to Clayter, with directions to strew it on the floor when he went to bed.

"It may cure him of his fancy," said the Captain to himself, as he walked homeward; "but anyhow, I think I have got something out of him. A will in the cabinet in his room. Let's see, that's the little study on the ground-floor, so old Hawley said this morning. I can slip in there quietly when the party is on, and no one will see me. He won't miss it."

The musical evening came at last; and when it came, Mrs. Clayter wished it was done and over. For it so happened that on that very day, Clayter, whose disorder had become seriously aggravated the last day or two, was taken with violent fits of *delirium tremens*, and was noisy and troublesome. Towards evening, however, exhausted by the excitement and the struggles he had gone through, he sank into a deep sleep. So she gave orders that his room-door was to be locked, and he was not to be disturbed.

Night came and the guests arrived. It was a large and brilliant assembly. Captain Hassard was delighted. He had never seen anything like it before, and he swaggered about the room and assumed immense airs on the strength of being father of the young lady, who, it was whispered, was to afford the sensation of the evening.

Of course Signor Scherzo was among the in-

vited, and equally, of course, he raised great expectations of the young *débutante's* powers. Between them, he and Hassard did all they could to make her first appearance a *fiasco*; for, although Violet played with considerable skill and taste, she was not the paragon of perfection which their over-zealous admiration pictured her.

It had been arranged that she was not to play until late, in order that all the guests might be there to hear.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Clayter of the Captain, whom she met stealing out of the room a short time before Violet's performance was due.

"A father's feelings!" said Hassard. "I am very nervous. I was going—I was, in fact, going to ask the housekeeper for a nip of brandy!"

"Father's fiddlesticks!" said the candid, if not courteous, hostess. "But I suppose anyhow you want the brandy. Go and ask for it!"

The Captain went down stairs, consoling himself for the snub with the thought that he was about to execute a *coup* which would place this proud woman in his power.

He stole quietly along the passage to the

study. He was a little surprised to find it locked, but he managed to turn the key noiselessly. He heard the uneasy breathing of the sleeper, which redoubled his caution. Carefully feeling his way, to make sure of not running against the furniture, he crept towards the cabinet. It was not locked, and was empty, with the exception of the bottom shelf. There he felt a couple of books, a bottle, two or three papers, and at last a long folded paper, which he guessed must be the very document he was in search of.

He stepped on tiptoe to the room door, and took a hasty glance at the first sheet. It *was* the will—that was enough. He went back as noiselessly as before, closed the cabinet, and left the room.

When he regained the music room, he found a little buzz of expectation going round. His daughter was just about to begin.

She was a little nervous at first. But after a time she began to think less of herself and of the surrounding company. Her attention was absorbed in her music, its difficulties, and its beauties. She played capitally.

When she finished there was a loud burst of applause. Honestly, it was not very valuable, for every one had come prepared to applaud, if

there were the slightest excuse for doing so. Mary was taken with a "bad attack of the sentimentals," as Laura called it, and rushed to the piano and kissed her child rather theatrically. There was renewed applause, and Signor Scherzo raised a cry of "*bis*," which was taken up. Mrs. Clayter asked Violet to play again.

But, just as Violet sat down at the piano, and ran her fingers over the keys, there was a loud scream outside the door, which was immediately flung open, and in rushed a figure all in white—looking more like a corpse than a living being.

The confusion that arose was immense. The ladies screamed, and the men shouted.

"Dead! Dead! They've blinded me—they've eaten out my eyes! Help! help!" shrieked the unfortunate being, and the next instant fell headlong on his face.

There was a doctor in the room. He had less difficulty in understanding the nature of the apparition than the rest of the company, for he was aware of Clayter's habits. He came forward now and examined the prostrate figure.

Presently he looked up, and said quietly, but with considerable meaning to the terrified guests, who had not yet recovered from their alarm sufficiently to stir—"It's a bad case.

You had better go down stairs, all of you, and send for your carriages, and get away as quickly as you can ! ”

Mrs. Clayter, in a bewildered state, was kneeling beside him, gazing at her husband in alarm. The doctor glanced at her to see if she was looking at him ; and, finding she was not, signified to the company by moving his lips, without uttering a sound, the awful word “ Dead ! ”

CHAPTER XI.

MEN ARE DECEIVERS EVER!

MISS FITZGEOFFREY came to London with a considerable colonial reputation. She had been a "star" in Australia, but she failed achieving any decided triumph in London. Though she had been beautiful possibly at one time, she was no longer young, and though she had considerable stage experience she was not a genius. The result was that the young fellows vowed she was "a doosid fine woman," and the old ones that she was "an uncommonly clever actress." Nevertheless, the letters announcing her name on the posters dwindled with painful rapidity, and the enterprising manager who brought her out did not see his way to prolonging her engagement beyond the first season.

Some of the old playgoers, and many old actors declared that they had known her under another name in other days. No doubt if she had made a hit they would have troubled

themselves to trace back these recollections, and we should have had her history, from her *début* in some of the theatrical papers. But as she failed to electrify the town, the matter was forgotten, and she was allowed to fall back into the second, if not third, rank of the profession, without any *éclaircissement*. To be sure, her own sex did not forgive her even then; and there were stories of old So-and-So, who remembered her as a mere "*corps de ballet*," and thought there had been some curious scandal about her. But nobody took much notice of these spiteful innuendoes, who knew the stage and the sex.

She was acting at "The Leicester" finally, and as "The Leicester" went in for the legitimate drama, was to be found acting the Queen in "Hamlet," and other parts of a like nature. She was, in fact, no longer as young as she had been, to put the calamity of mature years as delicately as one can, out of consideration for a lady's feelings. You would never have suspected her of having been one of those sylph-like creatures in muslin skirts and pink stockings, who spend their evenings more or less on the tips of their poor toes. Nevertheless, there was a decided fascination about her. Though there was a good deal of her,

you would never for a moment have thought—much less said—that there was too much. There was a dignity about her that impressed you. Men who could resist the temptation of a pretty face and youthful arts—who could talk about “chits of girls,” were found betrayed into admiration of the ripe charms of the woman. The years that had robbed her of girlish grace had taught her the power a woman can wield. To put it briefly, she was not calculated to turn the heads of the boys—no laborious task, considering the levity of the objects to be turned—but she could inspire men, wise middle-aged men, with a passion of which the youngsters were not capable.

But she was as cold as ice—to all save one. It would be absurd to attempt to explain why. The wind may or can blow from any point of the compass, but as a fact it usually blows from one only at a time. The lightning may just as well strike a church, or a factory chimney, but it chooses to fall upon a tree, or a cottage. A woman's choice is like the wind or the lightning—you can't argue about it!

Out of the numerous gentlemen who surrounded her with courtesies and compliments, she selected for her favour no other than Captain Jack Hassard. _ Yes! while that poor wife of

his was pining at home in poverty, and amid the continual harass of debt and dunning, our honest Captain was fetching and carrying for this third-rate actress. His theatrical acquaintances had brought him into contact with the Fitzgeoffrey, and he had at first paid her attentions, because it was a part of his nature to be a *beau cavalier*, and to squire all ladies—except his wife. He had a peculiar influence over women, as I have already said, and when he chose to exert it they could not but feel flattered by his attentions. One sort of love is said to be akin to pity; another sort is twin-brother of self-love. Handsome Jack—Dashing Jack—Dare-devil Jack Hassard (he had been, and still was, known by all those nicknames) was just the fellow to win the love that is born of vanity.

The Fitzgeoffrey had, no doubt, learnt somehow or other that Hassard was a “swell”—he had taken care to let his theatrical acquaintances know that. She had *not* learnt that he was a married man—he had taken care *not* to let his theatrical acquaintances know that. She was very gracious to him, and he was rather proud of her favour; and so things went on till he was recognized at last as her exclusive property. The other ladies, who had all in turn been flattered by the Captain’s attentions, saw that their

reign was over, and with no very good grace withdrew from the contest.

It seems absurd that a man of Hassard's age should have been such a lady-killer, but he was a showy fellow, and his grey moustache seemed rather to mark the veteran warrior than the elderly man—seemed the result of campaigns and hard-fought fields rather than of accumulating years. Commend me to a veteran as a lady-killer. A man of more tender years is preyed upon—he is not the destroyer. He sighs at Beauty's feet; the old soldier can bring her to his knee.

At first Hassard had simply amused himself by dancing attendance on the Fitzgeoffrey. But he was too shrewd and practical a man to forget very long to calculate the advantages of his position. He contrasted this splendid creature—with her splendid capacity for earning money—with his poor weak wife at home. What did it matter to him that his wife had brought him a dower of youth, and affection and purity; and that the antecedents of this actress were obscure and questionable? He pictured to himself the advantage of a woman with talents that could be converted into hard cash, without any effort on his part; and he sighed to think he had married one who could

only cry to his creditors, and suffer penury for his sake.

He began to see that there was a possibility of deriving advantage from the Fitzgeoffrey's open and avowed liking for him. Who could tell what might happen to release him from his present tedious matrimonial ties? Here was an advantage to be cultivated!

His brute courage stood him in good stead, and enabled him to establish himself firmly in the Fitzgeoffrey's good graces, without his having to commit himself by any protestations to her.

The jealousies of a theatre are as numerous as the tales with which Scheherazade amused the Caliph. Miss Rose Cecil took umbrage because Miss Fitzgeoffrey was cast for a part which the fair Rose considered should have been hers. The fair Rose was deeply beloved by Mr. Travers, the *jeune premier*, and she inspired him with fury on her behalf. Mr. Travers expressed himself more plainly about Miss Fitzgeoffrey's talents, looks, and character than was becoming in a *jeune premier*, and Captain Hassard, without further ado, inflicted chastisement on the offender. It was a very pretty quarrel, and might have led to serious consequences, but for "your only peacemaker."

"*If*," said Travers's friends—"if you fight him, he will kill you." They were impressed with a belief that Hassard was a regular fire-eater, and had fought three duels a day in Spain, though how they should have learnt that faith, save from the Captain's own veracious lips, I am at a loss to say. Anyhow, the quarrel came to nothing—not even to an action for assault, Travers feeling that to confess yourself horsewhipped and ask to be paid for it, was not exactly the course which was likely to endear him to, or elevate him in the eyes of, a British audience. But the Fitzgeoffrey, I need hardly say, was in raptures with her champion. Whether she had deserved it or not, calumny had been pretty busy with her character, conceiving that it was licensed to say what it chose about a woman who was on the stage. It was the first time that any one had spoken word or struck blow in her defence, and it really moved her heart, though that doubtless necessary organ had, as a rule, had little to do, save superintend the circulation of her blood.

She did not believe in men. She had heard so many vows of affection, and constancy, and honour, and had found them invariably so worthless, that she had no faith in a man's

words. But when his actions spoke—and she, for the first time, found a man who for her sake would *do*, and not *say* merely—she could not but believe him. As a woman, she could not see that to some men it is as easy to deceive by actions—often more easy—as it is to deceive by words. In short, she did not understand that to Jack Hassard it was not more difficult to horsewhip a man than to tell a lie. He could do either with equal boldness, but the feminine mind does not understand that the courage which knocks a man down is not greater than the courage which tells a lie and sticks to it.

Hence it was that the icy barrier, behind which Miss Fitzgeoffrey entrenched herself against the advances of mankind in general, thawed at the presence of Captain Hassard.

But Captain Hassard, with all his villainy and his calculating selfishness, was a man of inflammable temperament. He began to pay court to the Fitzgeoffrey as a speculation. He ended by finding himself—I will not degrade even so poor a form of the passion as is expressed by “in love,” by connecting it with his feelings—captivated by her. She was a woman to inspire passion, not to instil love. After a time he found himself so infatuated

that he could not allow an evening to pass without seeing her.

"Are not you coming home, dear?" asked Mrs. Hassard, when her husband, on that eventful night at Claytersville recorded in the last chapter, showed her and her daughter into a cab and shut the door. Mrs. Clayter insisted on her sister's going home—she could do no good by stopping; in fact, I think Laura felt her sister would be a hindrance rather than a help, so the Captain had hailed a cab for them and put them into it.

"Are not you coming home, dear?" said poor Mary, wishing in her distress to have her husband to talk to.

"No!" was the brief answer.

"You're not going to stay here; Laura does not wish it?"

"Going up to town on business," was all the reply he vouchsafed; and, when the cumbrous four-wheeler had departed, he flung himself into a hansom and drove off to "The Leicester."

The second piece was just over, and Miss Fitzgeoffrey, having finished her work for the evening, was in her dressing-room preparing to go home. He pencilled a few lines on the back of a card and gave to her dresser, en-

treating her to let him have a few words with her. She sent him back word on a scrap of paper that if he would wait at a certain corner, not far from the theatre, she would take him up in her cab. You see she kept up the proprieties as far as possible, and would not set tongues wagging by allowing him to accompany her from the theatre.

Captain Hassard followed her directions. She lived at Fulham, so they had ample time for a chat as they rumbled along in the tardy cab. Little did poor Mary, as she went home in a similar conveyance, dream of what her husband was doing, though she could not help wondering what sort of business it was that took him to town so late at night.

The Captain was in high spirits. He could feel in his pocket the document he had stolen from poor Clayter's room, and he had laid his plans already to turn it to good account. So he was positively gushing, though he was prudent enough not to betray his own rascality to his fair companion.

When he stole the will first, it was with a sort of instinct for revenge; but the death of Clayter had so hastened matters to a climax, that he had at once set himself to thinking how he could turn his possession of the will to im-

mediate and extensive profit. By holding it *in terrorem* over the widow's head he could extort money from her. With that money he would—pay off his debts and start afresh? No! He would go abroad—and not alone!

There was no possibility of talking confidentially in the rattling vehicle, which bore them towards Fulham, so the Captain and Miss Fitzgeoffrey, by tacit consent, chatted on general topics as they drove along. When they reached her lodgings, she invited him in, secure in the presence of her maid, who was sitting up waiting for her. Tomkins could go and sit in her mistress's bedroom for a few minutes, and propriety would not be outraged. So, when Tomkins had retired, the Captain, with his persuasive eloquence and especial aptitude for lying, told his story to the Fitzgeoffrey.

He told her that he could no longer struggle against the passion he felt. He had adored her ever since he saw her, but he was in no position to plead his suit. Now at length fortune had become propitious. By the death of a relative he was about to come into some money—not much, but still sufficient he hoped to keep her in comfort, and to withdraw her from a profession at once so arduous, and so often painful. Would she—could she—consent to be his?

The Fitzgeoffrey, with all her weakness for him, was a woman of business, and did not mince matters. She asked him in so many words if he wished to make her his wife.

Now the Captain, with all his disregard for honour and propriety, had a great regard for himself and his own safety. He had no intention of putting himself in danger by committing bigamy. But he was prepared, nevertheless, with an answer to the question which he had felt must arise between them sooner or later. He assumed a sorrowful countenance, and implored her to listen to his sad story.

He had, he said, been entrapped into a marriage when he was young. His wife, though still living, was practically dead to him. Insanity, which was hereditary in her family, had exhibited itself after the death of their only child. He was a lone man, to whom the world had been a desolate wilderness until the Fitzgeoffrey had enlivened it with an oasis. Would she fly with him to some foreign land, where, as man and wife in the sight of Heaven, they could live and love for ever?

He completely deceived her by this confession. In strict truth she did not much regard the rites of marriage. She had put the question as a test of his sincerity. She knew men,

as she thought, well enough to draw a conclusion from his reply. She had been prepared for an evasion of the question, but his apparent candour imposed upon her. Had he urged a secret marriage on account of his family, or declared his intention even of marrying her, she might have suspected him, for she had had many reasons to doubt the good faith of man. But the confession of a fact which might lead to her rejection of his suit seemed such an evidence of earnest feeling and honesty that her suspicions at once vanished. She pitied him! She consented to leave England with him, so soon as he could make arrangements about his fortune. She accepted the position without a murmur; for she, too, had her private reasons against a marriage!

"Jack, my boy," said the Captain, as he strode homeward, at the close of this tender yet business-like interview, "you're in luck's way to-day. Two such big events don't fall to one every week—wealth and woman!"

CHAPTER XII.

PARTING AND MEETING.

THE offices of Messrs. Uvedale and Metford were in Parchment-place, Bedford-row. They were large but gloomy, as became the chambers of a firm that had such multitudinous tin boxes inscribed with all sorts of names, noble and otherwise.

It was a good old business, that had been carried on for two generations. The present representatives were Mr. James Uvedale and Mr. Bertrand Metford. They were not quite the same stamp of men—and lawyers—as their fathers had been before them, but that did not so much matter, as they had old and experienced managers and clerks under them. When you went to Messrs. Uvedale and Metford for legal advice, whichever of the firm happened to have the honour of receiving you, listened to your outline of the case to be considered, and then rang the bell and ordered up the particular clerk in whose department cases of this especial

kind lay. They, as it were, took your orders, and going to their legal beer-engine, drew the particular tap of jurisprudence—with a head on—that you desired. Or, to put it more genteelly—for I verily believe that Mr. James Uvedale, who prided himself on the horses he drove in the Park, or Mr. Bertrand Metford, who considered himself one of the best-looking swells out, would have fainted at the bare notion of being compared with a common publican:—the firm were your very polite hosts, who, learning what peculiar vintage you desired, ordered up a cobwebby and sound bottle from some special bin, for your exclusive delectation.

I should not be stating the strict truth, however, if I said these two gentlemen never did any business. They were frequently concerned in Joint-Stock Companies, in the prospectuses of many of which you must have seen their names figuring as solicitors. It brought them into contact with a more than ordinarily wide circle of distinguished persons. Viscount This, the Earl of That, and the Honourable Tother were on the Direction of the Joint-Stock Company for the Manufacture and Exportation of Self-Supplying Cucumber-Sunbeams. Admiral A, Sir Something B, and Lords C, D, and E

were on the Board of the Universal Wash-your-clothes-without-any-soap Company; or, the Build-your-own-house-without-any-bricks Company, or some other equally wise, beneficent, reasonable, and profitable speculation; and Messrs. Uvedale and Metford, as legal advisers of these associations, were made acquainted with these distinguished directors, even if their professional services were never required until it became necessary to wind up the company.

Mr. James Uvedale, whom the clerks in the office who had served under his father found it difficult to abstain from calling "young Mr. James," was a tall, fair man, evidently struggling, in the interests of the firm and out of regard for his clients, to repress an instinct to dress himself like a stage-coachman. Mr. Bertrand Metford was a tall, bald, but big-black-bearded man, with a piping treble voice, and a partiality for velvet morning coats and white waistcoats, much festooned with heavy gold chain.

To these gentlemen—within a week after the decease of her husband—enters Mrs. Clayter in a state of considerable agitation. She is received by Mr. Metford, who, after hearing her description of the cause of her excitement, orders up a

bottle from the oldest bin on the premises—sends, in fact, for Mr. Mogridge, the chief managing clerk.

Mr. Mogridge is something like a vintage of a good sort, for he is old and dry—a little wizened old gentleman, who seems to have been first saturated with a knowledge of the law, and then gradually simmered down until he had become mere extract of statutes, to be used after the fashion of that concentrated essence of beef, of which one square inch contains the strength and nutriment of a whole bullock, and which, when dissolved in warm water, will supply beef-tea for a regiment. You served Mogridge somewhat in this way—you chipped a little bit off him for the need of the particular client, and it served it amply, without the least apparent diminution of the original Mogridgian essence of the statutes.

To the dry but invaluable Mogridge did Mrs. Clayter explain the cause of her anxiety. It could be explained very briefly. Mr. Clayter had died, leaving in her possession a will executed in her favour shortly after their marriage. Of late years, however, her lamented husband had unfortunately got into a habit—of which she had vainly tried to break him—of visiting taverns, and drinking with all sorts of strange

and disreputable persons. One of these disreputable persons was her brother-in-law, an unscrupulous adventurer who had, no doubt, endeavoured to avail himself of poor dear Mr. Clayter's unfortunate propensity for strong drinks, to persuade him to make a new will revoking the former document, and probably drawn-up in favour of this scampish relative.

Since poor dear Mr. Clayter's death, the said scampish relative had, in so many words, declared that this second will was in his possession, and that he should proceed to prove it unless it were made very well worth his while not to do so. For the sake of poor dear Mr. Clayter, his widow was most anxious to prevent any scandal, and was prepared to make considerable sacrifices. But the scampish relative was so very exorbitant in his demands that she hesitated to comply with them until she had consulted poor dear Mr. Clayter's solicitors, and take their advice.

"You have not seen the will, madam?" asked Mogridge, the old and dry.

"No, he will not show it me."

"Humph! That looks bad for him. Do you know the exact nature of, or any particulars about, the disposition of the property, madam?"

"No, nothing. At least, that is to say, I am told by this person that no provision is made for me."

"You know nothing about the time or place, when and where, or the legal advisers, if any, by whom this was executed?"

"Nothing at all."

"Then, madam," said Mr. Mogridge, looking at his chief, and speaking, as it were, under his correction—though that chief was too wise to dream of any interference with his experienced subordinate. "Then, madam, I think you may set your mind at rest. If the will be a *bonâ fide* one in this person's favour, he would not be likely to sell it to you; he would prefer to see it carried out. If it were really a document making other dispositions of the property than those contained in the will you hold, this person would have made you fully acquainted with the provisions, in order the more readily to drive you to terms."

"Ah, you do not know him! I can derive little satisfaction from assurances of this kind!" said the widow.

Mr. Metford signified his adherence to Mogridge's opinion.

Mr. Mogridge shrugged his shoulders deferentially. "At any rate, madam, our advice

is"—here he again looked at Mr. Metford as if he were deriving his inspiration from him—"your best course will be to refer that person to this firm, and to leave it to us to investigate the matter, and to make the best terms we can, should it be deemed necessary so to do."

Mrs. Clayter consented. The stopper was replaced in the Mogridgian decanter, and it was sent down stairs, until it should again be required.

Mr. Metford then devoted a few minutes to a chat on general subjects with the widow—in consideration of the fashionable parties she had been in the habit of giving—and then conducted her himself to her carriage.

I cannot say that Captain Hassard altogether liked the notion of transferring his negotiations to Messrs. Uvedale and Metford. But the widow positively refused to see him; and, as he was anxious to dispose of the stolen document, and realise, for reasons my readers will divine, he had no choice but to place himself in communication with Mr. Mogridge.

The Captain did not understand much about testamentary matters, but he had read the will, and it seemed to him a very absurd one. Poor Clayter had left his property to be divided among the various publicans whose houses he

had frequented, with legacies of from fifty to a hundred pounds to the various boon companions he had been in the habit of meeting at those houses. It was Clayter's own penmanship, but the writing and signature were very shaky, and told a tale of a drink-enfeebled hand, as the clauses did of a drink-enfeebled mind.

At last, after some correspondence and a good deal of shuffling and finesse on both sides, the Captain and Mr. Mogridge had an interview. The latter, on learning the nature of the will, assured the former that it could not hold water, if it were disputed. The judge of the Probate Court would decide against it at once.

But the Captain did not mind that—he knew that the widow would rather pay for its suppression than oppose it in court; and he told Mogridge as much with complete candour. Mogridge retorted that the widow was now in the hands of Messrs. Uvedale and Metford, who would act as they considered the necessities of the case and the ends of justice demanded.

The skirmishing went on for some time, and at last they got as far as naming the consideration for which Captain Hassard would transfer the document.

At this stage, Mr. Mogridge urged that he



ought to be allowed to see the will. Captain Hassard saw no great objection, for he could have demolished old Mogridge had he tried to obtain possession of the coveted deed, by force or fraud. So he drew it from his pocket, unfolded it and laid it on the table before the lawyer, keeping his hand, however, upon it, to guard against a sudden snatch.

Mr. Mogridge read it down, and then signed—with the hand not employed in sustaining his gold double-eyeglass on the bridge of his nose—to have it turned over. The Captain turned it over. The lawyer gave an instinctive glance at the conclusion of the document, snapped his eyeglass together, and rose with a quiet smile.

“I’m sorry we can’t do business, sir,” said he, with a calm look of triumph. “The question between us just now was a matter of a hundred pounds either way. I cannot consent now to offer you a farthing.”

“What the devil do you mean?” asked the Captain, smit with a sudden fever.

“Ah, sir, your knowledge of testamentary law is evidently superficial. Even if that piece of worthless paper be signed by the late Mr. Clayter (which I do not admit), it is not attested by the signatures of the requisite witnesses,

and is, therefore, utterly valueless. Good morning ! ”

It would require the very largest capitals in the possession of that enterprising advertisement agent, who is said to have obtained a concession of the sides of the Suez Canal for bill-posting purposes, to convey the bigness of the oath which escaped from the Captain when he found he was foiled.

What Mogridge said was perfectly true ; but not until Mogridge said it, did it occur to the mind of the Captain that the signatures of two witnesses were necessary to legalise an instrument of the kind. He was the more savage because, if he had only known enough about it to be aware of the necessity for those signatures, he would have found no difficulty in filling them in.

He felt himself hopelessly defeated, and quitted the field in disorder. It was a rout, not a retreat.

And now contentment and peace returned to the bosom of the disconsolate widow. Everything had gone smoothly with her. Not only had she avoided a Probate Court scandal, but she had escaped the publicity of a coroner's inquest.

One of the advantages of inviting doctors

to one's *soirées* is that, supposing any one dies under suspicious circumstances during the evening (and in some cases an escape from dullness is so desirable as almost to extenuate a suicide), one has a medical gentleman on hand to certify the cause of death, and so obviate the unpleasant incidentals of a coroner's inquest. That judicial inquiry is of so very eccentric and devious a character that one is perfectly justified in trying by all fair means to avoid taking part in it.

Mrs. Clayter was glad enough to escape the nuisance and notoriety of an inquest on her husband, by a certificate from her guest, the doctor, who was present on the evening which Clayter so inconsiderately selected for his last appearance in society.

How mysterious are the workings of fate ! It was wholly and solely because, at the last moment, the Ponsonbys sent word to say they should be unable to come, that Mrs. Clayter thought of inviting the young doctor, at such very short notice, that, but for the number of possible patients it would introduce him to, he would have declined.

However, he gave the certificate ; the matter was hushed up, with many expressions of condolence with Mrs. Clayter. The unhappy man

was interred at Norwood Cemetery, and his disconsolate widow went to recruit her shattered nerves at Brighton.

In the meantime, there was distress at the cottage in Mount Pleasant. Mary had learnt with horror from her sister the Captain's attempt to extort money. She had not heard of its failure, for Laura left for Brighton after placing her case in her lawyer's hands.

But Mary began to be alarmed when the Captain, whose absence for a day, or even two, was not unusual, did not return home for a week. She wrote to Laura for information about him. Laura referred her to Messrs. Uvedale and Metford, as having carried on negotiations with him since her departure from town. So to Messrs. Uvedale and Metford the poor little woman determined to apply.

To my reader there will be no mystery about the Captain's disappearance, when I state that Miss Fitzgeoffrey's engagement at The Leicester having terminated by notice from her, that lady left London for the Continent. With her departed the gallant Captain.

He had explained to her, not the truth in detail, but the broad fact that his expectations had fallen to the ground, owing to the discovery of a will, setting aside the one under

which he hoped to have profited. They both of them were money-loving, and selfish enough to feel that they were disappointed, but each was committed too far to go back. The Captain could not bear the idea of meeting his wife after his defeat in an attempt to rob her sister; and he felt that he was securing a very marketable commodity in the Fitzgeoffrey's dramatic talent. The Fitzgeoffrey could not consent to give up a conquest which she had achieved under the inimical battery of the eyes of her professional sisters. Besides, behind the interested and selfish motives in each case, there was something of a passion that drew them together.

Accordingly, one dim, dull foggy morning, not long after the Captain's interview with the crafty Mogridge, this pleasant pair of lovers turned their backs on London, and took ship at Folkestone for Foreign parts.

To return to Mount Pleasant. When she heard from her sister, Mary at once set forth, accompanied by her daughter, to seek an interview with Messrs. Uvedale and Metford. Arrived at the offices in Parchment Place, she inquired if she could see either of the partners. "They were both engaged at that moment. What was the nature of her business?" She

said it was of a private nature, and only for the ear of one of the firm. "Would she take a seat, and wait?" She would, and did. We can avail ourselves of a privilege not extended to Mary and her daughter, and peep into the private sanctums of those two ornaments of the law, Mr. James Uvedale and Mr. Bertrand Metford. Mr. James Uvedale is according an audience to a young gentleman, Lancelot Oldham by name, who comes duly accredited from the office of the *Daily Cockcrow*, to learn some particulars about the great Patent Self-igniting Safety Firewood and Kettle-boiling Company (Limited), which has just been launched under the auspices of Messrs. Uvedale and Metford.

Mr. Bertrand Metford is giving a sort of friendly consultation to Captain Elwin, who is day by day becoming more and more hopelessly entangled in the meshes of old Scardrake's web. He has been again and again liberated partially from that fatal snare, only to struggle into more entanglements. He has come at his wits' end once more to seek counsel from the family solicitors. Mr. Bertrand Metford, like the shrewd and not too scrupulous man he is, has counselled Elwin to marry, and has even gone so far as to offer, on an agreement that the Captain shall pay him a sort of commission

on his winnings, to put him on the track of a wealthy widow. The bargain is just being struck as Mary and her daughter pass his door on their way to Mr. Uvedale's rooms. The name and address which Mr. Metford hands to the Captain are "Mrs. Clayter, the Royal Palatial Hotel, Brighton."

Mary has been summoned through the speaking tube to Mr. Uvedale's room. Having finished his interview with Lancelot Oldham, who is gathering up his notes, Mr. Uvedale calls down into the lower office that he is ready to see the lady who is waiting.

As she and Violet go up stairs they meet Mr. Oldham coming down. He stands aside to let them pass, and he cannot help looking at Violet and admiring her, for she appears to great advantage in her simple mourning dress. Mourning is a double advantage to a pretty girl. She is sure to look nice in black, and the suggestion of the mourning is sympathetic, so that the observer is affected through the heart and the eye at once. Lancelot Oldham goes down stairs, wondering to himself if he shall ever see that sweet, pure face again.

Of course, Mary learns nothing from Messrs. Uvedale and Metford about her husband's disappearance. He is gone, that is clear!

And here I must ring down the drop-scene, to rise presently on the same actors, of whose shares in the coming drama I hope you have now some conception and understanding.

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

THE FIRST BOOK—CONSTANCY.

“A good heart is the sun and moon ; or, rather, the sun,
and not the moon ; for it shines bright, and never changes.”

SHAKSPEARE, *Henry V.*, Act v. sc. 2.

CHAPTER I.

A FIRST IMPRESSION.

SINCE the curtain fell in my last chapter, Time has sped on apace. The irrevocable years have hurried by ; and borne along on their rapid current the characters in this story of mine have gone on their allotted course.

You saw in those chapters of the Prologue what fortune attended the two sisters who married—the one for love, the other for lucre. They must now yield the foremost places in the picture, to be occupied by others. Henceforth our interest must centre in Violet.

When, by slow degrees, Mary was compelled to recognize the fact that her husband had deserted her, and that the long delusion, which she had cherished with wilful blindness—the delusion that with all his faults he still loved her—was ruthlessly destroyed, her courage gave way. She had suffered and struggled for him, but now that she was alone—so sadly

alone—she had no strength, no hope left to inspire her. She broke down.

During her prostration the creditors of Captain Hassard made a clean sweep of whatever small remains of a home had been left her.

It was then that Violet's nature was developed. She had inherited little from her father save a fearless spirit. It stood her in good stead now, and enabled her to hold the ground when her mother's strength failed. She knew that her Aunt Clayter could be relied upon for assistance in their worst need; but she did not care to call for it until that worst need came. She set herself to considering their position, and arranging for their future. The first thing she did was to take furnished apartments. She had thought out her plans, and in pursuance of them she took lodgings in Lambeth, not far from Vauxhall Bridge. They were unpretentious enough, in a little *cul de sac* of a lane called The Grove, because there were a few small struggling limes there.

Violet selected it for several reasons. First of all, lodgings were cheap in the small humble houses there. Secondly, it was a quiet respectable place. Thirdly, it was a good address, if not a stylish one; and, fourthly and lastly, it was not a very great distance from the new

district of Pimlico, which was spreading fast over the low marshy shore of the Thames—a district of stucco villas and genteel squares, a region where Gentility was expected to take up its abode.

Violet had her designs upon Gentility—especially upon Gentility with growing girls; for she had made up her mind to turn her sole accomplishment to good use. She was going to give music-lessons.

“We are enough indebted already to Aunt’s generosity; she has given me in this knowledge of music the means of making enough for us to live upon, mother dear. Let us turn it to account.”

“But, my child, think what weary work it will be for you—and the pay is so miserably small!”

“Well, we can but break down at last, and throw ourselves on Aunt for assistance; but, at any rate, I can, and ought to, make the trial before we appeal to her.”

She was hopeful and cheery, though in her inmost heart she knew well enough that what her mother said was true, and that it was a sore drudgery she was about to enter upon, and a paltry pittance she was likely to earn.

She advertised in the papers, but the answers

were few and far between, and her terms were grumbled at even in those few cases. But she did not despair. By slow degrees she made her way. She brought her best energies and an unwearying patience to her task, and was so fortunate in getting her pupils on, that she gradually increased her connection through their recommendations.

It was a proud and happy day when she felt that she was earning enough to warrant her hiring a piano in order to keep up her own practice, and to continue her own studies.

There was need of a bright day now and then in her life. It was hard and dark enough at most times. The long and weary walk from house to house, in fair weather or foul, cold or hot, wet or dry, day after day the monotonous round had to be done, and yet the tiresome trudging from one place to another was relief compared with those dreary lesson hours. "Dum, dum, dum," up the scales and down the scales, with everlasting slips and blunders—"dum, dum, dum," with a painfully mechanical thumping, and in too many cases an utter absence of ear that made it quite immaterial to the performers whether the note struck was the correct one or no. And then the airs and graces of the sweet creatures she had to teach—the

spoilt misses not out of their teens who thought it their duty to be rude to her because she was only a governess, and their pa was, oh, ever so rich ;—the elder damsels who resented the impertinence of a governess who dared to be nice-looking and lady-like, which they were not, and could not be, though pa *did* keep his carriage.

Poor Violet ! Her good looks were the source of much bitterness to her. Her dress was humble enough and shabby enough, I am sorry to say, to have atoned for her prettiness. But somehow, in spite of the worn stuff gown, the faded shawl, and the plain straw bonnet, her face was one that was not to be missed. Many and many a time was it made to blush by the vulgar stare of those lounging well-dressed ruffians, whose notions of manliness seem to be that when a woman is unprotected it is their duty to insult her. Many and many a time had she to hasten—weary as she was—to escape from the persecutions of these fellows, taking refuge at times, with beating heart and shortened breath, in her pupils' houses, and dreading lest her tormentors should wait for her outside to renew the noble chase.

She was a very pretty girl, though the prettiness was not easily explainable, save on the

ground that expression is everything. She looked very charming when she was neatly dressed for an evening; for among other things she used to go out to play dance-music at the parties given by her pupils and their friends.

They were not evenings of amusement for her. The dancers never seemed to think she was anything but a mechanical figure, with patent action and fingers warranted not to wear out. To be sure, a couple of glasses of sherry—or a glass of table-beer possibly—and a couple of dry sandwiches (those two top sandwiches of a dish-full, cut early in the day, which the prudent always avoid) were given to her during the evening to sustain her strength; and she got—sometimes, not always, for occasionally the party went down by instalments, and so she got no respite—a brief rest while the guests were at supper. But that was compensated by the extra celerity expected of her when the youths returned, like giants refreshed, with flushed faces, and began those post-cœnal gyrations, styled by courtesy after-supper dances, which are generally spoken of next day as having been “awfully jolly—out and out the best part of the evening.”

To be sure, on a few of these occasions the



pretty pianist was not overlooked as an automaton by some of the gentlemen. But she would have preferred to be ignored. The attentions they paid her were far from flattering in their condescension, and she was sure to suffer for them at the hands of the young ladies of the house—"really, Miss Hassard, you must not let gentlemen come and chatter to you while you are playing—I'm sure in that last waltz it was almost impossible to make out what time you were keeping!" And this pleasant speech would be administered under the very nose of the offending youth, who was thus shown how he had lowered himself by talking to a servant. It is astonishing how women who could not tread on a worm can make a metaphorical promenade of the most tender sensibilities of one of their own sex. The cruelty of woman to woman is almost incredible: Violet knew it well!

It was a hard struggle and a dark one. It held out no ray of hope for the future to make its bitter toil more endurable. She could not look forward to anything better than this weary drudgery. Her fancy—and a youthful fancy should be rich in pictures of the time to come—could only show her herself grey-haired and thin, still trudging the same weary round in all

weathers. It was a sad life enough, but she never allowed her mother to think she was borne down by its dull weight. For her she had always a smile and a pleasant word. For her she would always sit down and warble some merry little ditty, though she was weary of the song, of music—of herself almost.

Of course Aunt Clayter was anxious to remove her niece from this weary employment. She wished to have her as a companion, quite forgetting, in that careless selfishness of hers, that Violet owed her first duty to her mother. Violet would not, however, offend her aunt by saying this, for she knew her well enough to be sure that it was want of thought rather than of heart, in this particular instance, which made her disregard Mary's feelings. She felt that Aunt Clayter meant kindly, though her kindness, like charity, began at home to some extent.

So Aunt Clayter exerted her eloquence in vain, and for a time was a little sore at Violet's refusal. But she possessed some shrewd common-sense, and when the first smart was over admired her niece all the more for her spirit. "Where on earth she got it from, though," said she to herself, "goodness only knows—not from poor dear Mary, that's certain. But

I like her independent spirit, and her bravery in putting up with the miserable drudgery. She shan't suffer for it. I'm sick of people who are ready to swear their souls are not their own at your slightest wish, because they think you have a little money."

All that Aunt Clayter could persuade Violet to accept was the sum of fifty pounds yearly—a sum which Violet handed over to her mother. It paid for their lodgings, and sufficed Mary's modest requirements in the way of dress.

Meanwhile, no news ever reached them of the Captain's whereabouts. His wife used occasionally to insert advertisements, furtively, without Violet's knowledge, begging him as "J. H. (an officer in the Spanish army) to return to his disconsolate wife and daughter, and all would be forgotten." She did not know the full extent of the offences she thus offered to bury in oblivion. She believed, from what she had learned from Mr. Uvedale, that the Captain had merely fled from his pecuniary troubles, and because he was ashamed of the extortion he had attempted on Laura Clayter. She had no idea that he was accompanied by the fair but frail Fitzgeoffrey. You see the Captain had been silent about his theatrical connections, and Mary was not acquainted with

any of the profession who might have been able to enlighten her.

Violet, who had been enlightened as to her father's treatment of her mother, never mentioned his name. She was scarcely old enough to understand at the time, what she saw afterwards by the light of Mrs. Clayter's explanation—the selfish neglect, the heartless cruelty of his conduct to poor Mary. She sometimes wondered if he would ever return, and reflected that if he did she would have to fight against his influence in defence of her mother. But she seldom bestowed much thought upon him. Her life was not so brimming over with happiness that she could afford to brood over the imagination of possible ills.

At last there came a gleam of sunshine for poor Violet.

She was engaged to play at an evening party at the house of one of her pupils. It was a favourite pupil, it so chanced, and the party was given on her twenty-first birthday, and Violet put on her best in honour of the occasion. It was not a very gorgeous "best," as you may imagine, but it was becoming. Thanks to its simplicity and taste, it bore favourable comparison with many a fashionable *toilette* that evening. More than one gentleman thought to

himself that "the little girl at the piano was as killing as any of 'em, after all," as he stood and stared about the room with the calmness that characterises the British swell when not on active service in the mazy waltz.

There was one person in the room who gazed at Violet with as much curiosity as admiration.

"I am sure I have seen her before—it's not a face a fellow could easily forget—but I can't, for the life of me, remember where I saw her," mused this gentleman. He contrived presently to make an excuse to look at the music of a dance that Violet had just played. "Would she permit him to see who was the publisher?" And he cunningly peeped at the name written at the top—Violet Hassard.

"Violet Hassard! A pretty name—at least the Violet is pretty. But I don't remember any one of the name, except the Fitzgeoffrey's flame, and he can have nothing to do with her—Violet Hassard! No, I don't remember having met any one—and yet her face is curiously familiar."

He inquired of the young lady of the house, telling her his reasons, but she could not enlighten him, though she did not snub him—for a wonder—because he showed a curiosity about

such a humble and unimportant personage as a pianiste.

You see Violet's face must have photographed itself somewhat strongly in his memory, for the only time that Lancelot Oldham had seen her, was at the offices of Messrs. Uvedale and Metford, where they encountered each other on the stairs. But there was no one at hand to whisper "Parchment Place" in his ear, so after puzzling himself in vain for some time, he had to give it up, and offer his arm to a sweet damsel in pink, for supper was announced and the ladies were to be taken down.

The ladies sat down first, for there was not room enough for all at the table, though it had been enlarged and lengthened till the attendant greengrocer, who was fortunately not of a corpulent habit, took a good deal out of his threadbare black coat by scrubbing against the walls in going round to attend to the guests.

I need not describe the supper, or record the popping of champagne, the snapping of cracker bon-bons, and the giggling over the mottoes. Supper, like all mundane happiness, must have its limits, and so must the appetite of the fair sex. When the last breast of fowl had disappeared and the last cracker had been ex-

ploded, and the last motto put into the last left-hand waistcoat pocket, "to be treasured for ever," until the old clothesman purchased a reversion in it, together with the freehold of the discarded vest—when, in short, the ladies had gone up stairs, and the gentlemen who had been growing politely impatient for their departure, had set themselves steadily to eat and drink all they could lay their hands on, Violet's pupil asked her to "sing them something while the gentlemen were at their suppers."

Violet at once consented, and sang a pretty ballad, and then some of the other ladies came and asked her to sing again, and she gave them a bit of the last new opera. After that she gave place to one of the guests who had been asked to "sing us one of your charming songs, Bella, there's a dear"—and Bella consented, though she did not care to sing when the gentlemen were out of the room. While Violet, thus relieved, was sitting in a corner not far from the instrument, in order to be able to take her place at it when required, a lady came up to her.

"You have considerable execution, and sing with good taste," said the stranger, with a cold tone of approval.

"It is very kind of you to say so. I—I have

considerable practice, and have studied for many years," said Violet, almost apologetically, for there was something in the other's manner which seemed to indicate that it was presumptuous in a person in Violet's station to sing and play well.

"Ah!" said the stranger, looking at her stonily, and summing her up very obviously, "you teach, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. Miss Winterby is one of my pupils—that is how I came to be here this evening. I have taught her these two years."

"Indeed!" said the other, snapping her up, as if she felt it rather a liberty in Violet to talk so much about herself. "I suppose you could give me a few lessons. Of course," she added, in reply to a look of surprise from Violet, "I can play and sing, but I like your style of playing and singing, and I think I could learn it in a few lessons. I suppose your time is not all taken up?"

"Oh, no! I have no doubt I could arrange if you could tell me when it would be most convenient!"

"Have you not got any of your cards with you?" asked the other. "Of course, one cannot settle a matter of this kind here."

Violet had a card and gave it to the lady,

who took it and sailed off to her place with a cold "Thank you!"

"What has Esther Scardrake been talking to you about?" asked Miss Winterby, as Violet resumed her place at the piano. "Wanting some finishing lessons, I suppose, the giddy young thing."

"Yes, she asked me for my card, for that purpose."

"I don't envy you the task, dear!" said the kind-hearted girl; "she's a horrid old frump, though she's rolling in money—that's her father there just come in with papa. Isn't he an old horror? He wants to get a grand husband for Esther; but he has not hooked one yet. He must make haste, musn't he, or she'll be an old maid?" And with that Miss Winterby went off to get up the first quadrille after supper, the gentlemen having at last contrived to tear themselves from the eatables and drinkables.

They kept it up late, and weary enough were poor Violet's fingers as she played "Sir Roger de Coverley" as a grand finale.

"It was a dull, damp morning, and when Violet had put on her bonnet and came to the door there was not a cab left. Miss Winterby, wearied with the gaiety and excitement of the evening, had flung herself down on a sofa as

soon as the last guest took leave, and forgot all about Violet. The servants, of course, could not trouble their heads about such a trumpery person as a governess; so, while Violet was standing undecided on the door-step finding no cab, and seeing the rain coming down steadily, the considerate footman shut the door behind her, put out the hall-gas, and went off to bed.

Lancelot Oldham was a few doors off struggling to light a cigar with a wax match. It was not easy to do so on such a morning, even by adopting the "bush" artifice of tearing up half a dozen loose threads of the match, and drawing them over the lighting end, that they may catch the more readily when it is struck.

"Good heavens, they're never going to let that girl go home alone, at this time and in such weather!" said he to himself. Seeing, however, that they were going to do so he approached her.

"Pardon me, Miss Hassard; I am one of Mrs. Winterby's guests. Let me see you to a cab, as some slight return for the charming music you have given us."

Violet blushed and became confused. She had not liked the notion of going home alone at such an hour, and yet she hardly knew what to do about accepting Lancelot's offered escort. Then

came the thought that they would soon meet a cab, so she felt she might avail herself of his protection so far. So she thanked him, and finally took his arm, to take a share of his umbrella.

But she forgot the earliness of the hour when she thought she was going to meet a cab almost immediately. They walked and walked, but not a single cab came in sight.

"I am afraid you are coming a great deal out of your way," said Violet; "I can really go home by myself now."

"I couldn't think of letting you do so," said Lancelot; "and it's not out of my way. Pray say no more!"

"But it is so very kind to take all this trouble—I am so sorry. You see I don't stay out as late this, but Miss Winterby is one of my pet pupils, and I could not refuse her."

"You must be very tired of playing," said Lancelot, with a strong inclination to take in his the hand that was nestling on his arm.

"I am a little—I have given a good many lessons to-day."

"You are fond of music?"

"Oh, yes—very fond of it."

"I suppose you go to the operas and concerts sometimes?" said Lancelot, though he

really supposed nothing of the kind ; but that was his artfulness ! For when Violet answered in the negative it gave him an opportunity of telling her that he could always get her tickets, and that led to his explaining who and what he was, and altogether to their becoming good friends and such pleasant company in spite of the rain, that they were quite sorry when they reached the end of The Grove.

Violet would not let him go any further, but he waited at the end till she got safely to her door, and then took off his hat, and set out homeward with that indescribable mixture of pleasure and pain which a man feels when he finds himself for the first time honestly and earnestly in love.

CHAPTER II.

PERIL AND PRESERVATION.

WHEN Captain Elwin, in his chronic state of difficulty and despair, applied to Messrs. Uvedale and Metford for advice and assistance, it will be remembered that that superior person, Mr. Bertrand Metford, had cut the Gordian knot by saying, "Why don't you marry a woman with money?" and agreeing in turn for a liberal commission to put the Captain on the track of a likely victim—that victim being no other than Mrs. Clayter.

That lady was living in great style at the Royal Palatial Hotel, at Brighton. Obtaining an advance from Mr. Metford, the Captain was able to put up at the same hotel. People were nothing if not continental at that fashionable resort. The great hall was a sort of general lounge of an evening, where the ladies could display their most gorgeous evening costumes, and the men could show their most elaborate shirt-fronts, and dawdle, and flirt, and talk nonsense.

Captain Elwin had a good many friends among the swells at "The Palatial," and was not long there before he managed to form the acquaintance of the widow. She was not sorry to meet him half-way, for she was rather dull there. The class of people at "The Palatial" belonged to the very superior cream of society, which, with all her social success, Mrs. Clayter, of Claytersville, had been unable to secure for her evenings.

An acquaintance with Captain Elwin to some extent bridged the gulf she could not but feel existed between her and the supercilious creatures who drew their elaborately *coiffé* heads back, and glared at her through their double eye-glasses. The Captain availed himself of his position to be excessively attentive. Somehow he always seemed to be hanging about the place. If she came down to go out for her drive, he was in the hall ready to assist her to her carriage, and fetch her wraps for her. And when she returned he was there lounging on the steps to help her to alight.

Of course these attentions, while they were not lost on the widow, were not unobserved of the other visitors at "The Palatial."

"Vewy wick, I s'pose," yawned one dandy

to another, as they watched Elwin conducting her to her carriage.

"Vewy, I should say. Elwin's pwetty stwong, isn't he?"

"S'pose it's a case of a wich wife or bank-wupcy. He wasn't expected to settle aftaw the last Dahby; but he scwaped it togethew somehow."

"Awful sell that old uncle mawwyng like that! Quite a young woman; I should think it would be worth Elwin's while to wait till the old boy dwops off and mawwy the widow."

"Can't, ye know—against the pwayaw-book and that sawt of thing—a fellah musn't mawwy his gwandmotha', and all that, ye know."

"Well, he's making a vewy good wunning heaw. Ought to pot the stakes."

"Cweditaws would be doosid glad to heaw of it. They say he's pwetty deep."

"Well, ye see, they twusted him on his expectations. Dashed if I don't think undaw such ciwcumstances old fellows like the uncle oughtn't to be compelled to cleaw off all debts incuwwed on such an undawstanding."

"Ya'as: 'spose you intwoduce a bill about it when you go into Pawliament."

You see these friends of the Captain discussed him and his affairs with great candour,

and impartiality. His difficulties were pretty well known to his male friends. Nor were his creditors long in hearing of his matrimonial expectations, and greatly did they rejoice over them. They charged a comfortable interest on their money, and so long as there was a reasonable chance of getting it at some time or other they did not wish to be hard on him; for they felt that after all it was not his fault that his prospect of coming into his uncle's property was not realized. Having ascertained that the Captain was—as they described it—acting like “a man of honour,” that is to say, trying to entrap a rich woman into a marriage in their interests, they were contented to leave him alone until he should have had time to complete that excellent arrangement for the payment of his debts.

At first, of course, the Captain was bound to be silent as to his hopes. It would have been highly indelicate to intrude on the first year of Mrs. Clayter's widowhood. But when she laid aside her widow's cap, he felt he might be permitted to speak.

Mrs. Clayter, of course, could not affect to be surprised at his declaration. But she refused him kindly, though firmly. It was of no use, however, for the Captain's affection—and

his necessity—were too strong to allow him to take a repulse.

He continued the siege, following her from Brighton to Brixton and back again, as if it was impossible for him to exist out of her immediate neighbourhood. The widow was flattered. He was well connected, though, as she knew, not very well off. Nevertheless, she had a notion that he might be heir to a title, if not estates, and she had no violent objection to be beloved by one who was an officer and a gentleman of good extraction. Indeed, I am half inclined to believe that there was something like real sentiment in her heart for him. Their ages were nearer of a match than had been the case with her and the lamented Clayter. Certainly, the Captain's appearance was in his favour, and his courtesy and good breeding were captivating.

But as time went on, though his other creditors were pretty patient, and like so many "harps that once in Tara's halls," only dropt him an occasional note of "account rendered," with so much per cent. interest, in order "to prove that still they lived," there was one who began to press for a settlement.

Mr. Elias Scardrake thought it was high time that the Captain and Esther should come

to an understanding. So "he regretted very much, but money was very tight just now, and would his good friend Elwin square up accounts with him."

The Captain was placed in a pretty predicament now. He could not tell Scardrake that he was on the eve of marrying a rich widow, for he had by this time seen enough of the old usurer's hand to understand his game. To do the Captain credit he had calculated with great deliberation the respective advantages of the two marriages which were possible for him, for he never doubted his ultimate success with the widow for a moment. He reflected that whereas Esther possessed a drawback of considerable magnitude in the shape of her father, the widow was without encumbrances, and had neither brother, father, nor son to see after her interests. Then again, the widow was in a good position in society compared with the Scardrakes. His relations would hardly forget, even in consideration of the money she brought him, that his wife was the daughter of a disreputable old money-lender. As Mrs. Clayter was a widow it little mattered how the money she had was obtained; the lamented Clayter might have been a butterman or greengrocer, it was of no consequence. He had been con-

siderate enough to deodorise the hard cash by dying and being buried, and there could be no possible objection to the Captain's handling it as the widow's second husband. Esther was younger perhaps than the widow; but the widow was fresh and jolly-looking, and Esther was unfortunate enough to remind you of her father, which gave her a vulturine appearance not prepossessing.

So, on the whole, all things considered, the Captain decided to choose the widow. But it was necessary to keep old Scardrake quiet, so he divided his time pretty equally between the widow and the maiden.

Esther began to think the long-expected declaration was coming at last. Old Scardrake grew obliging again, and all went well.

But the Captain was still earnestly urging his suit on the widow, while she was still reluctant to resign her freedom, or doubtful of his sincerity. She continued to hold out.

The Captain felt that he could not go on for ever in the two-strings-to-your-bow performance. He had an ominous recollection of a rhyme that stated very distinctly that it is "best to be off with the old love before you are on with the new." He saw it was necessary to bring matters to a crisis, and after some

cogitation he saw his way to winning the game by a *coup*.

That evening—let me describe the plot in a manner worthy of its importance—a cloaked figure might have been seen to quit the Palatial Hotel. I say “cloaked,” but to be exact it had on an overcoat. It glided down the Esplanade, and disappeared in a narrow street which led to the stables where the widow’s horses stood at livery.

The cloaked figure might have been seen in deep converse with one of the horse-keepers, and shortly afterwards it wound its way up a steep hill to a cottage where dwelt Mrs. Clayter’s coachman. With him, too, the mysterious figure talked earnestly in subdued tones for some minutes. A close observer might have seen a five-pound note pass from the cloaked one to the coachman.

That cloaked one was Captain Elwin.

The next afternoon Mrs. Clayter went out for her usual drive. The coachman, to whom she generally left the choice of the route, took her along the Downs. It was a pleasant autumn day, with a fresh breeze blowing, and the widow enjoyed her outing considerably.

Presently, as they were driving along a road

that wound across the face of a steepish ascent, and was quite unfenced towards the abrupt slope to the foot of the Down, a man who was very like one of the horse-keepers at the livery stables fired a gun at some sparrows that were picking up a precarious living by the roadside. Scared apparently by the report, the horses in Mrs. Clayter's carriage went off at a wild gallop, the coachman seemingly being quite unable to pull them in.

"Sit still, mum!" he shouted to his alarmed mistress, "it'll be all right—I shall be able to get 'old of 'em directly—Don't be afeard—I can keep 'em off the near side—and that's the only danger!" But to judge from the result he could *not* keep them from the near side. They got so close to it that Mrs. Clayter expected every instant that they would be over the edge, in which case nothing could save them from a very ugly spill.

The widow was terribly frightened now, but luckily her fear deprived her of the power of moving, so she made no effort to jump from the carriage. The horses seemed to become more and more unmanageable every moment, and the coachman seemed to have lost all control over them.

Just as she was closing her eyes expecting

the next instant to be dashed headlong down the slope, she saw a figure dash into the road, and clutch the horses' heads, dragging them towards the safer offside and gradually restraining and checking them, till at last they came to a standstill, snorting and trembling with excitement.

Then the widow was able to recognize her preserver. It was Captain Elwin: and she did him the honour of immediately fainting in his arms.

The coachman, who had now quite regained his mastery of his steeds, turned round with a grin at the Captain as he supported the unconscious form of the widow.

"Oncommon well done of all sides, sir!" he said, in a low voice. "But I'm precious glad you come as you did, for after I'd give 'em their 'eads they was really gettin' reg'lar 'old of me, and it would ha' been a job to pull 'em in."

"Silence!" said the Captain, snappishly.

"No 'arm meant, sir," said the man. "*She* can't 'ear."

"I'm afraid she is very much alarmed. Just run and see if you can get any water down there."

The coachman did as he was ordered, and

returned presently with some dipped up in his hat from a pool in the hollow. But his mistress had recovered, and was expressing her gratitude to the Captain for saving her life. So the coachman emptied his hat, seeing the water would be of no service. But a sly smile passed over his usually stolid face when he heard his mistress so profuse in her acknowledgments.

“All is fair in love and war,” says the proverb; but it is to be seriously doubted whether the extenuation was meant to include such an artifice as the bribing of a lady’s coachman to simulate a case of running away in order to have an opportunity of seeming to save her life. It is evident that Captain Elwin held that it did. At any rate, fair or unfair, his scheme was completely and immediately successful. The widow could not by any possibility hold out any longer; and when next the Captain declared his passion (which was as soon as they had returned to the Royal Palatial Hotel) she gave her faltering consent, and bestowed her hand and heart upon her preserver.

The Captain was radiant. Here at last was an escape from all his worries! There was only one cloud that looked ugly—and that was

Scardrake. He urged Mrs. Clayter to name an early day. She consented, and on her part expressed a wish that the marriage should be a quiet one. She did not think it would be becoming in a widow marrying a second time within two years after her first husband's death, to have a gorgeous wedding.

Under these circumstances it was not difficult to keep matters quiet until within a few hours of the wedding-day. This would prevent old Scardrake from making himself unpleasant.

But there were two little drawbacks that the Captain discovered ere he was many days older. Mr. Mogridge, confidential clerk of Messrs. Uvedale and Metford, came down by request of the widow to see to the settlements. Now, as the Captain had nothing to settle he could not in decency interfere in the matter of settlements. But it was a little unpleasant to discover that the acute Mogridge (acting in perfect good faith, and, of course, ignorant of the arrangement between the Captain and Mr. Metford) was tying up Mrs. Clayter's property for her in such a way that her devoted husband would not have the least chance of fingering a penny of it without her consent.

However, he consoled himself with the idea that with a little judicious kindness and affection he could wheedle all he wanted out of his wife. At any rate she could hardly let him go to prison.

The second drawback appeared of a less serious nature, though it was unpleasant enough. It was the discovery that he had placed himself in the power of his own coachman, that was to be. The fellow had evidently every intention of exercising it too! He met the Captain outside the Hotel, a day or two after the so-called rescue; and he congratulated the Captain, and expressed a desire to drink his health. Elwin flung him half-a-crown, but the fellow looked at it with the utmost contempt, and said he could not think of drinking the Captain's health with a coin of a lower denomination than "a skiv," as he expressed it. In fact, he very plainly led him to understand that the price of secrecy as to the little run-away adventure would be a constant black-mail. Elwin was too clever to show anger, so he laughed and pretended to be amused. But he said to himself, as he walked away—"Never mind, my rascal—make your game now. Once I marry the widow, *you* shall have your *cong  *, I'll bet you!"

“Good mornin’, my fine gen’l’mán,” was the coachman’s reflection. “Darned if you won’t be a little property to me, if I manages yer properly.”

CHAPTER III.

A SHORT CUT FROM FLEET-STREET TO GRAY'S-INN.

THE offices of that able and widely popular journal, *The Daily Cockcrow*, were situated in Little Greyfriars-street, which, as every one knows, is a narrow but busy thoroughfare, running between that great main artery of journalism, Fleet-street, and the chronically-impeded circulation of Fetter-lane.

Like many another street, Little Greyfriars-street has known better days. But most localities that have come down in the world, that have lost their hold of Gentility and descended to Business, retain some traces of their past splendour—if it be only those quaint old extinguishers with which the footmen of pre-gaseous London were wont to put out their flambeaux. But there is no discernible relic of old times about Little Greyfriars-street. It has had all its finer features scrubbed out by the hard hand of Labour. It does not in the least suggest that it was once the abode of the Re-

spectability that does not toil or spin. There is nothing about it to remind you of Wealth, unless it be the apparently lavish and inordinate extravagance of which it is guilty in the matter of bell-handles. There is scarcely a doorpost from No. 1 to No. 129 that does not boast a dozen or more brass-knobs, often accompanied by small plates, inscribed with all sorts of odd names or trades. Many of the houses have had the whole front of their upper storeys converted into one window, whereat men in their shirt-sleeves seem, to judge from the rapid action of their right hands, hard at work "picking up gold and silver," but are really employed in setting up type. Printers' trucks are pretty plentiful there, and if you go through the street during the dinner-hour you will find no end of Printers'-Devilry amusing itself with pitch-in-the-hole. Then there is a large number of publishing offices there, whence issue the *employés* of "The Row," laden with such sack-loads of literature you wonder how they can carry them. That place, yonder, whence streams the long string of girls, is a binder's. Next to it is a wood-engraver's; beyond that the office of *The Weekly Story Teller*, without which no gentleman's kitchen is complete. Michael O'Flannigan, the Champion Bill-Poster,

has his place of business over the way, and next door to him Puffin Brothers, the great advertising agents, have their head-quarters. And so on, throughout the street, you find every house pervaded by trades that labour in the interests of literature. If you were a millionaire—a capitalist is the technical term in this region—you might, without going out of Little Greyfriars-street, invest your riches in the starting of a magazine—and lose them!

The offices of *The Daily Cockcrow* are at the Fleet-street end of Little Greyfriars-street, about half a dozen doors up, on the right hand. You would never guess from the grimy and unpretentious exterior that this was the birth-place of a journal with circulation co-extensive with the terrestrial globe—an organ that made Downing-street tremble, and caused foreign potentates to writhe on their thrones. Seriously, you would never have suspected, as you passed it in the daytime, that it could issue the large editions which it boasted; for the whirl and bustle of publication take place at an unearthly hour in the morning, and render Little Greyfriars-street almost impassable.

There are two entrances, one for the publishing and advertising department, the other for the staff. This latter is rather like the stage-

door of a theatre, and has a sort of sentry-box, wherein sits a grim janitor, whose business it is to exclude bores and admit business. Up stairs, there are rooms of various degrees of comfort, from the handsomely-appointed proprietorial cabinet, and the snug editorial sanctum, to the more work-a-day-looking apartments wherein leaders are concocted; and so down to the bare chambers in which "appalling conflagrations," "alarming fatalities," and "extraordinary gooseberries" are manufactured. Behind, in what used in remote ages to be the back-garden, lie the printing offices, with the machines in the cellar, that keep constantly throb-throbbing, as if the whole premises were a living creature, with a very full pulse.

There is a silent but restless life about the place—a continual movement. That pale gentleman who has just gone up stairs is the head of the sub-editorial deparment—were it not for Saturday nights, he would be utterly unacquainted with the appearance presented by a bed during the hours of night. That stout old boy is—you would scarcely believe it—one of the most active of the reporting staff. That elegant youth with the flower in his button-hole, and the faultless gloves—a man whom you would expect to meet in Hyde Park rather than

Fleet-street—is one of the most slashing of the leader-writers. As he saunters in languidly, drawing off his lavender kids, he doesn't in the least look as if he were going to sit down and pen a couple of columns that will make the Home Secretary fit to dance with fury, or drive a leading member of the Opposition into a frenzy of rage. That white-bearded veteran, who looks like an old general, has smelt powder nowhere save at the theatres; for he is the dramatic critic of *The Cockcrow*, the terror of rising playwrights and the worshipped of theatrical managers. The gentleman with whom he is chatting is the chief "picturesque reporter," who won his fame by his vivid descriptions of war in Timbuctoo. He is not half so military-looking as our friend the dramatic critic, but he has "seen service," though he wielded no other weapon than a grey-goose quill. Strictly, he ought to be decorated with the Timbuctoo medal, for he has been under fire; and, you see, although a reporter's person, like that of a herald in old times, or a surgeon in modern times, is sacred and unsailable, it is not always possible to impress that fact on your plaguy spent-shot, or your devious rifle-bullet.

All these gentlemen, and many more, are

constantly coming and going, or keep incessantly on the move in the office, though what between cocoa-nut matting and habitual avoidance of noise, they do not make any audible stir or disturbance;—you may almost hear the scratching of the busy pens.

Lancelot Oldham's pen does not, I must confess, contribute much to the scratching chorus. He is supposed to be writing an account of a volunteer sham-fight that came off this afternoon at Panshanger. But he cannot concentrate his mind on his work. He is half-angry, half-amused, when, looking back a few lines to pick up the thread of the narrative, he finds that the words have acquired a lilt—a sort of dancing rhythm from the ghost of a waltz-tune that has been running—or perhaps I ought to say twirling—in his head all day. He scratches it out, and begins afresh:—"The rain which on the previous night, and indeed up to an early hour in the morning, had fallen in torrents"—and when he gets as far as that, he pauses again.

"I wonder whether she caught cold!" he muses. "I will call and inquire to-morrow, as I go to the Crystal Palace. The *fête* does not begin very early, and I shall have time to go round after I leave here."

Then he resumes his pen and his paragraph:—"had fallen in torrents, rendered the ground unfit for the contemplated manœuvres, but fortunately had cleared off, and given place to fine weather, which drew together a large crowd of spectators, many of whom came from London by rail."

"Confound it," says Lancelot, looking back again over his work, "this is the merest 'lining.' Hang me if I can write any better, though, this morning. I wish I had that fellow's facility!" And he gazes with envious eyes at a neighbouring desk, where old Heginbotham is scribbling away at twenty miles an hour.

There never was such a fellow as old Heginbotham. If a cannon-ball carried off his head as he sits there, I verily believe the balance of him—as a Yankee would say—would go on and finish the article. He was up till goodness knows when this morning, indulging in whiskey and water until it became necessary to have him taken home in a cab, with instructions to the driver to put him down right side up in his passage, and untie his cravat. Any ordinary mortal would have been racked with headache and afflicted with shakiness of the hand after such a bout, but Heginbotham shows no signs

of punishment. There he is reeling off sentence after sentence, brisk with epigrams and *bon-mots*, and enriched here and there with apt classical quotations—for the old boy is a scholar. I doubt if the scraps of Latin are very intelligible to the majority of the readers of *The Cockcrow*, which is a penny paper, but they probably impress them with a notion of the cleverness of that paper, just as they impress Slowman, the proprietor, with an idea of Heginbotham's genius, though Slowman's acquaintance with Latin is even more limited than his acquaintance with English!

Lancelot resumes work with a dissatisfied "humph!" that makes Heginbotham look up.

"Can't get on, eh, Oldham?"

Lancelot shakes his head, and gnaws the end of his pen.

"Ah, that's the way with you young chaps—always on the spree! The evening's amusement does not bear the morning's reflection with you fellows—it calls for 'soda and b.' instead. Why can't you be sober and discreet, like me?"

Heginbotham is fully conscious of his own failings, and makes no disguise about them. He never misses a chance of turning them to

chaff—it disarms those who would chaff him. Lancelot can only laugh and rebut the charge.

“Not whiskey, eh!” says Heginbotham. “Well, there are only three excuses for a journalist’s getting out of gear—drink, debt, or lovely woman. You deny the liquor, and I know you’re too careful a chap to be in a pecuniary hole—doesn’t know a bill-stamp when he sees it,” he says solemnly, apostrophising his ink-stand—“so there is only one other alternative. Is it a duchess or a dairy-maid? Have you lost your heart to one of the female swells that were at the review yesterday, or is it a pretty nursemaid that’s bowled you over? There, don’t look so savage about it—there’s many a better fellow has been in love with a nursemaid—*‘ne sit ancillæ tibi amor pudori’*:—as for barmaids, even I cannot resist them!”

“You be hanged, Heg!” said Lancelot, half-nettled at the chance shot, and not at all pleased at the notion of a nursemaid in relation to so delicate a subject. “You be hanged! And as for your barmaids, it’s the whiskey not the women—the liquor, not the lady, as certain alliterative writers, who shall be nameless, would put it.”

So with a laugh the two drop the wordy contest and set to work again. Heginbotham gets

his "copy" finished a long time before Lancelot, and goes off to take what he calls "a gentle stim" after the exhaustion of work.

Lancelot toils on through his report, and fails to satisfy himself. In truth, it is scarcely up to his usual mark; but the editor, if he notices the fact, does not complain. He is not as unreasonable as the British public, and does not expect a writer to keep at one high level of excellence three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

It is not very easy to explain why Lancelot should labour under the delusion that the shortest way from *The Cockcrow* office, in Little Greyfriars-street, to his chambers, in South-square, Gray's-inn, passes the end of The Grove, Lambeth; but certain it is that, *en route* from one to the other, he finds himself at the top of that modest avenue. Finding himself there, he thinks he may as well just walk down to the bottom and back again. It is only idle curiosity; he would like to make quite sure that he knows at which house Violet lives, because he intends to call and ask after her next day, he is so afraid she must have caught cold.

It is getting dusk, but he recognizes the house. There is a light in the upper window, and a woman's shadow crosses the blind at

times. Lancelot wonders if it is Violet's shadow, and finds it pleasant to believe that it is.

When a young man is induced to consider the nearest route from Fleet-street to Holborn is through Lambeth, and when he finds pleasure in watching a shadow on a window-blind, you need not be a spiritual medium to discover what is the matter with him. It does not require the stethoscope to ascertain that the seat of the disorder is the heart.

Lancelot Oldham had, of course, not been altogether exempt from minor attacks of a disease as universal as measles, but differing from it in this respect, that there is no limit to the number of times you may have it. He had been "in love," doubtless; but the phrase "in love" only signifies a mild attack—a gentle eruption that passes off in a few days, on a slight change of air. But now the fever was on him with full strength, as the symptoms I have described amply prove.

He stood for some minutes watching the house, and gazing up at the lighted window, until 369 Z, in whose beat The Grove lay, was driven to the conclusion that Lancelot was bent on "cracking the crib" he was watching so intently, and accordingly came clumping down the turning. The noise roused Lancelot from his

reverie, and reminded him of the suspicious nature of his movements. He had been about London at night too long and too often not to have a proper awe of the power of the police. So he hastened to move on without waiting to be told to do so.

As he turned the corner at the top of The Grove, he was met by a dainty little figure coming round it in the opposite direction. It was carrying a roll of music, and though the gas-lamp beneath which the encounter took place was not too illuminative, Lancelot at once recognized it. He hesitated.

"Oh, Mr. Oldham!" said Violet, for it was she. "You here—how odd!"

"I—I came to leave a note for a friend who is detained at the office," said our journalist, making a raid into the realms of fiction.

Violet would have noticed his confusion, had she not been occupied with her own. She felt that she had rather committed herself by that remark "how odd!" For the oddity consisted, if the truth be told, in the fact that she had been thinking about Lancelot at the very moment when they met.

"I intended to do myself the pleasure of calling to-morrow to inquire after you," said Lancelot, recovering his self-possession. "I

was afraid that you must have caught cold last night ! ”

“ Oh, dear no—not at all, thank you. I am used to being out in all weathers, so I am quite hardened. It is very kind of you to think of calling, and I should have been very sorry if you had, for to-morrow is one of my busy days, when I am out all the morning—till tea-time, in fact.”

“ What are your least busy days, Miss Hassard ? That is, if I may take the liberty of inquiring ; I should be able to know when it would be most convenient for you to go to concerts, or the opera.”

“ I have least to do on Wednesdays and Saturdays,” says Violet.

“ I have only one holiday,” says Oldham, “ and that is Saturday. You are better off than I am, you see.”

“ Mine are only half-holidays—and I don’t always get them ; for sometimes, when it is not convenient for them to take their lessons on their regular days, my pupils put them off until the Wednesday or Saturday.”

“ I must not keep you standing out here,” says Lancelot, holding out his hand. She places hers in it, and then he suddenly remembers that he has something else to say ; but it

is not very much, so he will keep hold of her hand till it is finished, and then he can shake it and bid her good-by.

Violet does not attempt to withdraw it—she is too intent on the important remark he makes as he holds it.

“There’s a grand concert at the Palace, by-the-by, next Saturday. Should you like to go? If so, I’ll get you tickets.”

“It is so very kind of you—I should like it very much, if I can get mamma to go.”

“I must do myself the pleasure of calling on Mrs. Hassard—may I not?”

“I am sure she will be very glad to see you. You must come when I am at home. When will it suit you best?”

“Will the day after to-morrow do?”

“I shall be at home between two and three, if that will suit you?”

“Capitally—and now good night!”

“Good night, Mr. Oldham.”

The little hand is shaken—rather warmly—at last, and they separate.

Lancelot was so delighted with the interview that he forgot to laugh at his mistake about the shadow on the blind. He had been sighing out his soul to the adumbrated image of little Betty, the maid of all work!

He sat up late that night smoking a meditative pipe, and building all sorts of castles in the air. But he was pretty practical for all that ; and if he planned these aerial structures, he set himself to digging solid foundations for them. For he began to calculate his salary, and its possible or probable increase. It was hardly enough to marry upon, he felt, though he was not a believer in the Genteel Code, which rules that a man ought not to marry on three hundred a year. Lancelot's visions of a competence were more modest ; but he still felt that his present income was not sufficient to warrant his marrying.

"I must turn my hand to literature," said he to himself. "I've been at journalism long enough to be able to get through my regular work and a little other writing besides. There are heaps of magazines—and there's that novel I have been going to write any time these five years. If I can only get into the swim, I ought to be able to make enough, with *The Cockerow* screw, to do very well upon. By Jove, there's nothing like having an object to work for, I'll set about it at once—no time like the present ! There's that paper on ' Civilization and Neuralgia, as convertible terms,' I have been thinking of writing for months. It's all done in my

head pretty nearly. I'll write it out, and take it to Fleecer and Goodie, and see if they'll take it for their mag."

The grey dawn found Lancelot scribbling off the last slip of his essay. He had begun in earnest, and to some purpose. Weary, but not dispirited, he flung himself on his bed to snatch a few hours' sleep.

If we might judge from the smile on his face, his dreams were pleasant ones—and Violet, no doubt, bore a part in them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FALL OF A THUNDERBOLT.

Two days after the party at the Winterbys, Violet had a letter from Miss Scardrake appointing an hour on the next morning for her call. Accordingly she presented herself punctual to the minute at Mr. Scardrake's "handsome villa residence" (to use a term beloved of house-agents), in the pleasant suburb of Norwood.

The handsome villa residence, handsome though it was, had a good deal of the appearance of a *parvenu*, as might have been expected of Scardrake's taste. It was built in that unmistakable modern Gothic, that tries to look antique and fails—it was the kind of house in which you would expect to find a gallery of ancestors, provided at per square foot by War-dour-street. The garden and grounds, laid out in capital style, looked very young and feeble: you can't plant "immemorial elms"—you must put them in as young trees, and let them

grow. Even a shrubbery cannot spring full-fledged from the nursery ; it must have time to spread and thicken.

Violet, however, was not very critical, and thought it a splendid mansion and grounds. They awed her as much as Esther's lofty manner had done at the Winterbys.

Of course, though she had fixed the hour for Violet's visit, Esther thought it quite reasonable that so inconsiderable a person as a governess should wait her pleasure. So Violet had to sit in the great depressing drawing-room for nearly half an hour, until she began to get into a state of fidget and alarm, lest she should be made late for her next lesson. What to do she did not know. She was afraid to ring the bell lest it should be considered a liberty, and she fancied if she tried to go away without saying anything to anybody, she would be stopped on suspicion of having stolen something.

She was almost desperate when Esther Scar-drake came sailing calmly into the room.

"You have been waiting some time," said she, without any apologetic tone, "but I was engaged. I told you the other evening what I wished. All I want to know now is what your terms are."

Violet named them.

"That will do. And when can you come?"

Violet gave her her choice of her spare hours and days.

"Very well. I shall want you on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from two till three. Good morning."

A brief and business-like interview enough! But Violet did not complain of that, for it enabled her to get to her next lesson in good time by dint of sharp walking.

On the next Tuesday she began her lessons. She found Esther by no means an agreeable pupil. She was not very quick; and, as might have been expected of such a hard nature, she had no innate sympathy with music. It did not come to her spontaneously. She had to acquire it by patient but painful drudgery.

Her singing, though she had a good voice, was a very unattractive performance. She threw not the shadow of a pretence of feeling into her songs. Had she been a musical box wound up to execute mechanically a fixed set of trills and roulades, she could not have frozen the soul out of the melody more completely.

By slow degrees, however, Violet contrived to impress upon her the proper phrasing of her songs, and so gave some vitality to her singing. But it was the vitality of a galvanised

corpse, not of a living, breathing being. Her playing she could not improve—she could infuse no expression into her correct but cold execution. To be sure, one rarely meets with any one who possesses the secret which makes the instrument speak—it is the gift of genius.

Esther was careful of her fine voice. She would not sing much, and she always took a glass of sherry as a tonic after singing. Of course, she could not think of hob-nobbing with a mere music-teacher, so she did not offer Violet any sherry in the room, but there was always a glass of wine waiting her in the hall. Violet was not troubled with pride, and had been accustomed to being snubbed by genteel people; but this was a little too bitter. She declined the wine the first time, but on her next visit was taken to task for it by Esther.

“Really, Miss Hassard,” said that amiable creature, “when people take the trouble to have wine prepared for you, the least you could do would be to drink it!”

Violet murmured something about not requiring it.

“Oh, nonsense!” said Esther. “I expect you to take it. Singing is trying to the voice, and the wine is beneficial. I don’t suppose you get it very often where you give lessons, and you

have a good deal of singing to do. Be good enough not to leave it in future; I do not choose that you should be knocked-up by the lessons you give me."

Violet stood rebuked, and thenceforth swallowed the wine—though it was sorely against her inclination. It seemed like a bitter dose, but she was too much afraid of Esther to refuse it.

When she was swallowing the dose one day, old Scardrake came upon her. He had been in his private room—the library, as it was called, but there were no books in it.

He was going to pass Violet by unnoticed, like any of the other servants in his employ. But her pretty face caught his eye.

"Oh, you're the young woman that's teaching my Esther music. I've been hearing your singing"—he had, and had sworn at it too pretty freely, as "cursed squalling," because it fidgeted him as he was going over his accounts. "You've a good voice. Would you like to go on the stage?"

Violet declined.

"Oh, you're afraid of the stage, eh? I suppose they have told you it's a wicked place, haven't they? But I dare say you'd like to sing at concerts, and that sort of thing."

Violet said she should be very glad to do so,

but she feared she was not good singer enough for that.

"Oh, bless you, there's many a swell singer who couldn't hold a candle to you. Look here, if you'll call on me at my office in town I'll see what I can do."

He gave her his card; and Violet, in her simplicity of heart, was quite grateful to him.

"Oh, don't say anything about it, but give me an early call. You shall be brought out, never fear; and you'll do, too, for they like a pretty face like yours."

The old wretch said this with a leer that he meant to be a killing smile, but which disgusted and terrified Violet.

.. He had a keen eye for a pretty face, the old rascal; and because some of the woman-folk at his theatres, knowing their employment depended on his good-will, pretended to be flattered by his attentions, he had persuaded himself that he was an irresistible lady-killer.

Esther, the matter-of-fact, was perfectly aware of this pleasant *trait* in her father's character.

She happened to come out of the room as he was talking to Violet, and her anger and contempt were pretty legible in her face, to the amusement of her father, and Violet's dismay.

"Not gone yet, Miss Hassard?" was all she condescended to say as she swept past the trembling girl, and marched majestically up stairs.

When Violet was gone, she lectured her father pretty plainly on his duty to his daughter.

"Really, if you must indulge your taste for philandering with low persons, you might as well do so elsewhere than in this house, and before me! If you go on in that way with a person like that, you'll be joking—as you call it—with the housemaids next."

"Pooh, pooh! Nonsense!" said her father, testily. "I was doing a little stroke of business. She sings well and looks well, and I should like to secure her for 'The Leicester.' She'd make a hit there; and things haven't been going well there for some time—we want a draw."

"Be good enough to tell me if you prevail on her to turn player; as, of course, I should have to discontinue taking lessons from a person who is on the stage."

"What absurd prejudices you have, my dear! I'll be hanged if I know where you got them from."

"I did not learn them of *you*—you are so very liberal on such questions."

With that parting shot, Esther left the room.

"I wish to goodness that fellow Elwin would come to the scratch—egad, it would be the scratch, too, for she's a vixen"—and here the old scamp chuckled at his own joke—"I wish he'd come to the scratch, and take her for good and all. I'm very fond of her; but she's got her mother's spirit, and I think if she had a husband to expend it on, I should come off better! That's a deuced pretty girl, though, that little musical governess. I suppose she can't be earning much at this sort of thing. A good salary would tempt her, I'll be bound, in spite of all her virtuous scruples about the stage. I won't give it up just yet; she'd be sure to go at "The Leicester." Besides, I like the looks of her; haven't seen a girl I liked so much for a long time."

So, to Esther's intense rage, and to poor Violet's great annoyance, old Scardrake made a point every Tuesday and Thursday of catching the little music-mistress as she was going away.

"You haven't been to call on me yet," he used to say; until at last Violet was obliged to tell a fib, and say that her mamma disapproved of her singing at public concerts.

"The more fool she!" was Scardrake's polite comment; "you'd make three times as much at it in half the time and with half the trouble that you do now. Your mother ought to know better than stand in your light. Give her my compliments, and tell her so. You're not called upon to obey her if she is so cursedly silly as that!"

But Violet was not to be persuaded. She had an instinctive dread of this man, and determined to avoid him as much as possible. He was equally determined not to allow her to do so, for he in his vanity set down her aversion as coyness, and found increased pleasure in the pursuit.

It was in vain that Esther protested and stormed. Her father had given way to her in everything until now, but on this point he would have his own way. She protested that it was not decent or respectable to have him paying such attention to "a person of that class" under his daughter's very nose.

"You're too high and very mighty, my dear. I've spoilt you, that's the truth! Remember your own father began life with only three-halfpence; and, but for my honest industry and unrelaxing labour, you might be no better off than 'a person of that class,' as you call her.

She's a deuced pretty girl, and worth her weight in gold at the theatre; and to the theatre she shall go if I can manage it, by hook or by crook. Look'ee here! No more of this nonsense. If you make any more fuss about it, curse me if I won't ask her to dinner—or stop, better still—I'll ask her to come and stay with us for a fortnight!"

"She wouldn't dare!" was all that Esther could hiss out, white with fury. "And you would not dare!" she added, after a short pause. But her father only laughed.

He was infatuated, that was the plain truth of it, and he didn't care what he did. He was very foolish indeed to quarrel with his daughter.

Hitherto they had agreed well, but now that he crossed her, he lost his power over her. She had been fond of him in her strange way until now, but now she despised—almost hated him. Her feminine instinct was right. She was correct in her judgment of him; and her suspicions, that his pretended anxiety for the interests of "The Leicester" was a sham, were just. At first he might have been actuated by the thought of bringing Violet out at the theatre; but as he came to see more of her, his designs narrowed into a more selfish and baser channel.

It would have frightened poor Violet sadly, if she had known the intensity of Scardrake's passion and his utterly unscrupulous nature; for, calculating and hard-headed as he was in matters of business, he would shrink from nothing that would gratify his selfishness.

Esther was so disgusted that she determined to sacrifice her music-lessons, much as she felt she was benefiting by them. Accordingly, one afternoon, when Violet had finished her lesson, she asked, or rather ordered, her to wait a few minutes.

"It is not convenient for me to take any more lessons at home, Miss Hassard. Where do you live? I suppose you have a piano, and I could have lessons there?"

Violet explained that her home was a very humble one, and her instrument by no means suited for giving lessons. Esther, who was ready enough to think evil of others, instantly suspected that Violet wanted to continue giving her lessons at the Villa, in order to meet her father.

"In that case, then," she said, in her frostiest tone, "our lessons must come to an end. Be good enough to say what notice you expect, and you shall be paid: but your services will not be required any longer."

Violet was very much hurt at this sudden rebuff. Her eyes filled with tears, and for a minute she could not find words to answer Esther. Before she had recovered sufficiently to speak, the door was flung violently open, and Scardrake, with a face white as ashes, flung himself into the room. Esther was so terrified she thought she would have fallen, but Scardrake took no notice of her. He had a newspaper in his hand—which was trembling with passion.

“There—look at that! look at that, I say!” he said in a curious sort of shriek, as he thrust the journal into his daughter’s hand.

Esther took it, and read what he pointed out, and then her face assumed the same livid hue as her father’s. She smote her clenched hand against her side, as if seized with a sudden pain, while the paper fell rustling to the floor.

Scardrake was alarmed when he saw the change that came over her.

“There! there!” he said, soothingly, his own anger dying out in alarm, “don’t take it like that!”

“Don’t touch me!” said Esther, shrinking from him. “I—hate him—and you—and every one.”

As she tottered away from her father she

seemed so feeble that Violet thought she would have fallen ; and, forgetting her own alarm in concern for Esther, she sprang forward to assist her.

Esther recovered her self-possession in a moment, and turned on her like a wounded tigress.

“Go !” she said, in a voice that rang sharp as an alarm-bell through the room. “Go ! What do you mean by prying into our affairs ? Leave the room, I say ! Go !”

She stamped her foot till the china in the buhl cabinets chattered again. Of course, there was a limit to Violet’s endurance even. She drew herself up with some of her father’s spirit, bowed, and left the room.

When she was gone, Esther gave reins to her fury. She strode up and down the room, with a raging heart, choked by her bitter sense of disappointment and wounded vanity.

Her father, sobered down by the sight of a more intense feeling than his own, sank into a chair, and taking up the fallen newspaper, read over again the paragraph which had been the cause of the fearful storm.

It was, as my readers have doubtless guessed, the announcement of the marriage, at St. Ethelburga’s, Brighton, on the somethingth

instant, of Laura, relict of the late Reginald Rede Clayter, Esq., of Claytersville, Brixton, to Captain Herbert Elwin, 20th Dragoons.

“ You shall have your revenge, Esther,” said Scardrake, bitterly. “ I’ll crush the beggar— by —, I will ! ”

“ Down to the very dust ! ” said Esther, hissing the words out between her teeth ! “ Oh, Heaven, how I hate that man ! ”

CHAPTER V.

UNDER FIRE.

“STAND ! Hold up yer hands, or I’ll shoot.”

When the person who uses such expressions emphasizes them by the application of a cold ring of metal to another person’s temple, said cold ring of metal being clearly suggestive of a revolver-barrel with a hammer at full-cock, and a ready forefinger on trigger behind it, the second person’s wisest course is to comply with instructions without delay.

Captain Hassard—for it was to his temple that the cold application above-mentioned was adhibited—was an old soldier, and knew what was the best thing to be done under such circumstances.

He stood—and he held up his hands. Consequently his interrogator did not shoot.

“What’s your all-fired game, strann-ger ?” was the next remark.

I think I am not making too serious a demand on my readers’ knowledge of foreign

languages, when I expect them to conclude from this last remark in what quarter of the globe we are re-encountering the Captain. I take it for granted they will at once guess it is America.

To be precise, it was in the United States, and on the banks of the Potomac, that the Captain was brought to a stand-still by the tonic action of cold steel, applied externally to the parietal bone.

When the Captain left England, accompanied by the Fitzgeoffrey, he repaired first of all to Paris. But his stay in that gay capital was not a very long one. The Fitzgeoffrey had scraped together as much as she could ; and the Captain, with commendable prudence, had borrowed as much as he was able to obtain as a loan from his friends. But this capital was not a large sum, and would not have long sufficed to keep them in so delightful and dear a spot as Paris.

The Captain accordingly looked about him, and contrived to make the acquaintance of one of the numerous Americans always to be met with in the French capital. They dined at the same table at a restaurant one day, and the Captain introduced the fair Fitzgeoffrey as "Madame," descanting on her dramatic powers and London reputation. The American, with

a national tendency to exaggerate compliments, said he thought she would "raise creation, and knock all the other female talent into a cocked hat," if she appeared in New York. The Captain took the hint, and in a few days had made arrangements to try his luck in the United States.

He found, however, that the American nation was not so wildly enthusiastic as his Paris acquaintance had led him to suppose. The Fitzgeoffrey was not a *furor* in New York. It was due possibly—for I don't like to be hard upon one of the weaker sex—to the fact that the American people were intent on something more important than a stage-play. Before our two friends had been long in New York, the war between the Northern and Southern States, from a probability, developed into a fact.

The Captain felt that, failing the dramatic success of the Fitzgeoffrey, this was the best thing that could turn up. He calculated the advantages and disadvantages on either side, and determined to place his sword at the disposal of the Confederates.

With this view he obtained, without much difficulty—lying being very easy to him—a pass that would enable him to cross the Federal lines, in order to secure certain property of his, which

She's a deuced pretty girl, and worth her weight in gold at the theatre; and to the theatre she shall go if I can manage it, by hook or by crook. Look'ee here! No more of this nonsense. If you make any more fuss about it, curse me if I won't ask her to dinner—or stop, better still—I'll ask her to come and stay with us for a fortnight!"

"She wouldn't dare!" was all that Esther could hiss out, white with fury. "And you would not dare!" she added, after a short pause. But her father only laughed.

He was infatuated, that was the plain truth of it, and he didn't care what he did. He was very foolish indeed to quarrel with his daughter.

Hitherto they had agreed well, but now that he crossed her, he lost his power over her. She had been fond of him in her strange way until now, but now she despised—almost hated him. Her feminine instinct was right. She was correct in her judgment of him; and her suspicions, that his pretended anxiety for the interests of "The Leicester" was a sham, were just. At first he might have been actuated by the thought of bringing Violet out at the theatre; but as he came to see more of her, his designs narrowed into a more selfish and baser channel.

It would have frightened poor Violet sadly, if she had known the intensity of Scardrake's passion and his utterly unscrupulous nature; for, calculating and hard-headed as he was in matters of business, he would shrink from nothing that would gratify his selfishness.

Esther was so disgusted that she determined to sacrifice her music-lessons, much as she felt she was benefiting by them. Accordingly, one afternoon, when Violet had finished her lesson, she asked, or rather ordered, her to wait a few minutes.

"It is not convenient for me to take any more lessons at home, Miss Hassard. Where do you live? I suppose you have a piano, and I could have lessons there?"

Violet explained that her home was a very humble one, and her instrument by no means suited for giving lessons. Esther, who was ready enough to think evil of others, instantly suspected that Violet wanted to continue giving her lessons at the Villa, in order to meet her father.

"In that case, then," she said, in her frostiest tone, "our lessons must come to an end. Be good enough to say what notice you expect, and you shall be paid: but your services will not be required any longer."

clared in their favour, as she was all along expected to do.

The Captain assured his interrogator that he did not carry any such article about with him, but that he was coming South in order to place his sword at the disposal of the Confederate commander.

"Been in the army?" was the next question.

The Captain, without specifying any particular army, replied in the affirmative, stating that he was a Captain, and had seen active service.

"Wal then, old hoss, you're just the very article we want—open to take any quantity. Come along."

With these words the scout, taking the bridle of the Captain's horse, led him along, followed by the Fitzgeoffrey, towards an opening in the woods. At the further end of this glade he halted and gave a shrill whistle, which was answered. In a few moments a body of men, about twenty in number, emerged from the wood in front, and came towards the Captain and his companions.

The scout in a few words explained matters to a young fellow who appeared to be an officer, and who at once saluted the Captain and the Fitzgeoffrey, and offered to accompany them to the camp. Of course the offer was one that

the Captain could not have refused had he wished ; so, thanking the young Confederate, and taking leave of his friend the scout, he at once placed himself at the disposal of the former.

In an hour's time the Captain found himself in the presence of General Beauregard, to whom he presented his letters and made offer of his services.

They were glad enough to get hold of experienced officers in the Southern, scarcely less than in the Northern Army, and the General expressed himself highly delighted with the acquisition of one who had served in Spain. He questioned the Captain pretty closely as to the state of affairs at New York, the tendency of public opinion there, and the probability of England's recognizing the Southern Confederacy.

The interview lasted a couple of hours, and it was late at night when the Captain and the Fitzgeoffrey, who was utterly prostrated with fatigue and anxiety, retired to the tent which the General had placed at their disposal, apologizing to the lady for the meagre accommodation which he was able to afford her.

The next day the Captain and his fair companion, armed with instructions, passes, and

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The next day the Captain and his fair companion, armed with instructions, passes, and

letters from the General, set out for Richmond, which they reached without further adventure. Here the Captain had an interview with President Davis, who was so well satisfied with his recommendations that he at once appointed him to a regiment on the point of going to the front.

The fair Fitzgeoffrey insisted on sharing the Captain's dangers, and accordingly accompanied the regiment, which in a few days marched to the scene of action.

It was early in the campaign, and as yet success had declared itself chiefly in favour of the Southern arms. As the regiment to which the Captain belonged marched on, many was the song and many the jest indulged in, at the expense of the Yankees; and frequent was the mention of the battle of Bull Run.

In due time the regiment joined the main body of the forces, and was posted on the extreme left of the position.

The warfare was of a fitful character, and was of a kind to which the Captain was accustomed—a continuous skirmishing of guerilla, and frequent raids on both sides in search of supplies, information and prisoners.

I am afraid that the Captain's expectations and views in joining the Southern army were

doomed to disappointment. He had calculated that the Southern army would be less strictly disciplined and allow a wider latitude in matters of plunder than the Northern forces, and it was on this account chiefly that he had joined the Confederate flag. He found, however, that if the Americans, Northern and Southern alike, had had but little experience in the art of war, they had graduated with great rapidity in one branch of the noble science—the acquisition of booty. There was not a house or a plantation within miles of the position that had not been completely cleared of all moveable property by marauders from one side or the other. Charred and blackened ruins of what had once been handsome mansions, trampled and devastated wrecks of what had once been fair gardens and fruitful plantations, met him wherever he went. But every available article that was at all portable had been carried off—things that were not portable sharing the fiery fate of the houses.

“Bress you, sar!” said an old negro, whom the Captain found one day wandering among the desolate remains of a planter’s residence, and of whom he had inquired as to the probability of procuring provision and fodder—
 “bress you, sar! Dere ain’t nuffin ’bout hyar.

post. The river was rapid, and though not wide, deep; and the ford was so narrow that only about four men could cross abreast.

It was exciting work waiting for the enemy's approach, and the Captain found his indolent circulation stirred into activity once again at the prospect of a scrimmage. He commanded the companies who held the earthwork, with orders, if the fire from that, and the rifles in the patch of timber, failed to check the advance of the enemy across the stream, to drive him back at the point of the bayonet.

After a long, anxious pause, there came a stir in the expectant ranks, as the scouts, who had been thrown across the river to give warning of the enemy's approach, came out of the woods on the further shore, and hurried down to the bank of the stream.

The Federals were close upon them. Before they were half across the stream, the sharp crack of a rifle was heard—a tongue of flame darted out from the wood in their rear, and one of the scouts, dropping his rifle in the stream, staggered wildly forward to gain the bank; but ere he reached it lost strength and consciousness, was carried off his feet by the current, and borne down a few yards, when he sank and disappeared. But his friends had little

time to watch him. A dozen rifles from the patch of timber replied to the fire which had killed the scout. The men in the earthwork took up the chorus, and immediately the answering fire of the enemy fringed the wood with flashes of flame. Volleys were for a while exchanged, but with little or no effect. Of the two, the Federals suffered more, for their opponents had entrenched themselves, whereas they took up their positions at the edge of the wood just as they happened to march up. So, presently, under cover of the smoke, which soon wrapt the intervening space, they made a dash for the ford. A withering fire from timber and earthwork played upon them. A handful leapt into the stream and pushed for the opposite bank; but the delay, necessitated by the narrowness of the ford, gave the enemy an immense advantage. Their fire was concentrated on the mass of Federals with disastrous effect. To add to the slaughter, a couple of howitzers, which had been ordered up, when the scout first brought news of the advance of the Northern troops, were just got into position, and, opening fire on the crowd at the ford, threw the whole body into confusion. After wavering for a minute or two, the Federals broke up and retreated in no very good order to the protec-

tion of the woods. The few gallant fellows who had succeeded in crossing the stream, finding themselves thus unsupported, had no choice but to re-cross the ford, under a fire so severe that but few reached the shore, and very few, indeed, the friendly shelter of the woods.

A loud cheer from the Confederates followed on the withdrawal of the foe. But the Northern troops were waiting for reinforcements, and availed themselves of the interval to re-form their shaken and decimated ranks. But by this time the noise of the firing had conveyed news of the skirmish to the whole Confederate line, and regiments were being hurried up to support those that were attacked.

From a skirmish of outposts the affair was growing into a general engagement. Once more the Federal forces quitted the shelter of the woods and advanced towards the ford. Their field batteries, which had come up, unlimbered rapidly, and directed a heavy fire against the chump of timber, which had, by superiority of position, done more damage than the earthwork, against which a charge of cavalry was directed.

This time the Federals were more successful. Their artillery nearly silenced the fire from the timber; and their cavalry, swimming their horses

across the river, despite a storm of bullets poured upon them, succeeded in creating a diversion by charging their horses at the earthwork. It was desperate courage, for from behind it the Confederates kept an incessant fire on them as they advanced. With diminished numbers, but undiminished pluck, they actually leapt their horses over the breastwork into the midst of the enemy, who hardly expected such a feat, and were accordingly but ill-prepared to receive them.

Captain Hassard fought like a lion. His men caught the infection of courage and stood at bay grimly. They made short account of the Federal troopers, though they themselves suffered severely.

But the charge of the cavalry had answered its purpose, and had enabled the infantry to push across the ford in sufficient numbers to advance upon the Confederates, while the rest of the troops came up to their support. With a loud cheer, they lowered their bayonets and went on at the double up the slope.

The Confederates gave an answering cheer, and pressed forward to oppose them.

Then in the midst of the smoke came the sharp clink of the engaging bayonets. But the Confederates had the ground in their favour—the Federals wavered and fell back. Coming

upon the forces, which had not had time to form after crossing the ford, they flung them into disorder. The Confederate commander saw his advantage, and ordered a general advance. A short but severe struggle followed, which ended in the repulse of the Federal troops.

It was in the charge which drove the advancing enemy back on the ford that Captain Hassard felt a sharp sting in his left shoulder, which so far disconcerted him that he failed to notice that a Federal soldier was aiming a blow at his head with his clubbed musket.

Luckily, the Captain, instead of wearing the soft felt hat of a Confederate officer, had donned a hard "deer-stalker;" for it broke the full force of a blow that, even thus weakened, was sufficient to render the Captain oblivious of things mundane until long after the last Federal had disappeared in the woods, and the Confederates were taking stock of their victory and its cost.

When they carried the Captain back to the camp, the Fitzgeoffrey was inclined to scream and faint; but had the good sense to check the inclination, and apply herself to tending the patient's wounds—a shot wound in the left shoulder of a very slight character, and a rather serious cut on the right side of the head.

CHAPTER VI.

A DISCHARGE WHICH LEADS TO AN EXPLOSION.

THE honeymoon of Captain and Mrs. Elwin was not suffered to reach its second quarter in undisturbed splendour. The Captain had never expected that it would. Every time the post came he nervously examined the letters, fully prepared to see the business-like hand of Scardrake. That worthy wrote in due course demanding a settlement, and congratulating the Captain on his union with a lady who was known to be in the possession of wealth which would render such a settlement of Mr. Scardrake's claims a matter of the greatest ease.

The Captain was a little astonished at the calm and reasonable tone of the letter. He little guessed how often, and with what intense fury and hate, the usurer had penned that epistle before he could satisfy himself. So the Captain wrote a civil answer, spoke pleasantly of his honeymoon, and pleaded to be excused from

transacting any business until that period of bliss had expired.

He received no reply from Scardrake, but in the course of a couple of posts he got a letter from Scardrake's solicitor, demanding an immediate settlement of all claims, and stating that if Captain Elwin did not forward a cheque for the amount of Mr. Scardrake's claim, together with a fee of three and fourpence for the cost of the application, within two days from this date, proceedings would be instituted without further delay.

Captain Elwin was furious ! He dreaded the broaching of so unpleasant a subject as his debts so soon after his wedding. He knew that his bride was no fool in matters of business, and he felt that she would at once conjecture that he had merely married her for her money.

To do him justice, the Captain was really attached to Laura, even if his first object had been a mercenary one. Though his senior by some years, she was a fine-looking woman, and he was proud of her. He dreaded to picture to himself what she would think and say, when he confessed the heavy liabilities under which he laboured.

However, there was no escape for him. He knew Scardrake well enough to feel that it was

useless to expect a moment's grace, or a moment's consideration.

It took him all day, after receiving the lawyer's letter, to make up his mind to speak. At length, after dinner, while Laura was sitting in a low chair doing some fancy work with her back half-turned to him, he summoned courage to broach the subject.

"My love, I am extremely sorry to—to trouble you with such matters, especially now—but the fact is, you know, one must take the bull by the horns; and, in short, why, you see, it must come out sooner or later."

Laura looked at him with some surprise, but said nothing; so the Captain tossed off a glass of sherry, and then, clearing his throat, began again.

"The fact is, some confounded people have heard of our marriage, and are taking advantage of it to—to worry me."

"Indeed! How?"

"Well, you see, I am a poor man, as you know, my love—I always told you that, didn't I? Well, at one time, in order to oblige a friend, I—I—I joined him in some money transactions, which—a—in fact, to put it plainly, he failed to meet. The fellows, of course, might have come down on me, you know, but they

saw I wasn't worth powder and shot, so the matter has been standing over in hopes of their—a—getting hold of him in short. But now, hang me, if they're not coming down on me—had a letter this morning to say that if it wasn't paid in a couple of days, they'd proceed against me. 'Pon my soul, I'm awfully sorry to bother you with these particulars; but, you see, I haven't a penny of money—and—a—what is a fellow to do?"

"How much is it?" asked Laura, rather gravely.

The Captain said really he couldn't be quite sure—"it was so long since, you see." He was afraid to confess to the full amount, and not a little alarmed to see Laura looking so grave.

"Well, my dear," she said, without looking up from her work, "I will write to Uvedale and Metford, and tell them to see into it and settle with these people. I hope this is not going to happen very often, Herbert?"

Herbert expressed a similar hope, but admitted that he was afraid there was a possibility of people resuscitating claims against him which they had long since let drop. It was very "hard lines, upon his soul!"

His wife could hardly avoid the suspicion that he had not been influenced by affection only in

his suit—interest, she feared, had something to do with it; and the conviction fell chill upon her heart. She had married for money herself once; but this time she had really believed that she was loved with a disinterested love, and she had—especially after her rescue—felt something which was the nearest approach to affection that her nature was capable of. The disillusion was painful.

“It is fortunate,” she said, coldly, “that Mr. Mogridge, in drawing up the settlements, tied up the money as he did, or these resuscitated claims you speak of might prove costly. I think I shall be justified, under such circumstances as you describe, in opposing such extortion in future. This once I will settle it, but in any other cases I shall give instructions to Messrs. Uvedale and Metford to contest it”——

“In which case, my dear,” said Elwin, with some bitterness, “you will have to make up your mind to dispense with my presence for some time.”

“What do you mean, Herbert?”

“Why, I mean that these beggars will put me in prison. They have the power, and they will exercise it; but it doesn’t matter. I don’t suppose that imprisonment will kill me.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” said his wife, angrily.

"You don't suppose *I* could put up with such a disgrace, if *you* could. Really, Herbert, I do not and cannot think you acted with candour in not telling me of your difficulties at first."

"My love, I told you I was a poor officer, with only my pay to rely on, and I said I had been living beyond my means."

"Which I supposed to mean that you had a tailor's bill or so to pay. I never supposed that you had been involved in money difficulties of this kind."

The Captain made all sorts of excuses, and exerted all his arts of blandishment to pacify his wife and remove her suspicions. He was not altogether unsuccessful. By the time her letter to Uvedale and Metford was written and posted, she had recovered her former cheerfulness.

Mr. Bertrand Metford was not astonished at receiving a note from Mrs. Elwin, requesting him—or rather the firm—to see to the settlement of a claim preferred against her husband by Mr. Scardrake.

"I must see Elwin myself as soon as he comes to town. There's a little account standing between us that he must settle too. I must look after it pretty soon, too, for I guess his creditors won't lose much time now they hear he has

married a woman with money. They'll want their bills paid off before he has time to make ducks and drakes of the fortune—though he won't do that so easily, for that 'cute old file Mogridge tied up all the money without waiting for instructions from me — though, for that matter, I couldn't in decency have instructed him otherwise. But I must get my share of the old girl's plunder for all that. If Elwin's only sharp enough to behave decently well to her, and not get found out, I've no doubt he'll be able to twist her round his little finger, and get any amount of cash out of her ! ”

Thus musing, the refined scamp whistled down the speaking-tube, and summoned the acute Mogridge into his presence. He then gave him Mrs. Elwin's letter, and instructed him to settle the claim on the easiest terms he could. When the experienced clerk saw whose the claim was he shook his head.

“ No compromising claims with Scardrake, Mr. Metford. He'll have it all to the last shilling. He's a regular hard-fisted one.”

“ Well, you must do the best you can, Mogridge.”

“ I will, sir, as in duty bound ; but I can confidently predict that he won't knock off the odd seven shillings even.”

With that Mogridge withdrew, and applied himself to the settlement of the claim. His prediction was verified. Scardrake never did bate a farthing of any claim, and he was not inclined to depart from his rule in favour of Captain Elwin. So the money was paid to the last shilling ; and never was old Scardrake paid in full with so little satisfaction. He liked the money, but he would have lost it to get a little revenge. But he consoled himself with the thought that the money would not last for ever, and that when Elwin had run through his wife's fortune it would be his turn again. In the meantime, he set himself assiduously to purchase any bills or acceptances of the Captain's that he could discover—and there were plenty.

It is a bad look-out for a man of the Captain's tastes and habits, when a money-lender takes a solemn vow to ruin him, for the money-lender is assisted to his revenge by his victim's own folly and weakness.

By the time the Captain's honeymoon had reached the close of its last quarter, it was pretty well enshrouded in clouds ; for, as Mr. Metford had foreseen, Elwin's creditors, with one consent, wanted their money.

It was useless to try and conceal the extent

of his indebtedness from his wife any longer. She paid off all claims, but she did so under protest of the most unpleasant kind. She no longer hesitated to charge him with interested motives in marrying her; and the only answer the Captain could make was to say that he had saved her life at the risk of his own, and that that ought to be sufficient to disprove the charge she brought against him. Laura was obliged to admit this plea; and so, though there were occasional bickerings, they generally ended with a reconciliation, and a few tears on the part of the lady.

The Captain received a note from Metford soon after their return from the honeymoon, and went, as requested, to call upon that gentleman. There was a little sharp cross-firing to begin with, for the Captain declared that he was justified in repudiating his arrangement with Metford, because the latter had not performed his part, inasmuch as he had deprived him (Captain Elwin) of the power of dealing with his wife's money. Metford persisted that that was no part of his undertaking, and declared that it was the Captain's fault if he allowed Mogridge to tie up the money in that way.

Ultimately the two rogues settled their dif-

ferences, and Metford agreed to wait until the present pecuniary storm was a little blown over. He felt he might do so with safety, since Mrs. Elwin seemed so ready to clear off her husband's debts.

"If you're only sharp, you'll get her to make her will in your favour, Elwin."

"Not a bad notion—but I don't see how it's to be done."

"For a consideration!" said the lawyer.

"What do you mean?"

"On the same terms as our last arrangement. As her legal adviser, I can recommend her to make her will, and by taking instructions be enabled possibly to frame it in your favour."

The chance was too good to be lost. The bargain was struck, and Mr. Metford performed his share so well that, within a week, he had in his possession Laura's last will and testament, wherein she devised all her money to her husband, with the exception of a handsome legacy to her niece.

Everything seemed to be going well with the Captain now, and he was in high glee. He was in such spirits that on the afternoon of the day on which Metford told him the contents of the will, happening to pass old Scardrake in

the street, he had snapt his fingers at him behind his back, as he fancied, unobserved. But the old fox's ears were sharp—he heard the sound, and guessed its import. But he said nothing—he only put down another entry in his long score against the Captain.

What with one thing and another since his return to town, Elwin had been too busy to carry out one determination he had arrived at on the eve of his marriage. But the time came, and he did what he had all along planned.

He went down to the stables one morning, and had no difficulty in finding ample grounds for blaming the coachman. The fellow, calculating on his hold over the Captain, had become careless and idle. He had more than once levied black mail on his master while they were away on the wedding tour, but Elwin had felt it would not be prudent to quarrel with him then. He had better wait till after their return to town, when he could pay him, and get rid of him at once, without giving him an opportunity of appealing to his mistress.

The Captain's submission to his demands had given the coachman extra courage. He began to assume airs that made him unpopular with his fellow-servants, who complained to their

master of his over-bearing ways. The Captain said nothing, but let the charges accumulate till a fitting opportunity. When that came he went down, as I have said, to the stables and found sufficient evidence of neglect, dirt and carelessness to warrant him in discharging the fellow.

"Whitcomb," said he, summoning him into the harness room, "I can't allow things to go on in this way—look at the state of that harness! It's disgraceful."

"It's all along o' the air on the Downs," said the fellow with a grin. But the Captain would not pretend to understand the allusion.

"Your fellow-servants complain of your conduct, and say that you or they must go."

"Let 'em go and welcome," said the coachman; "I ain't a-goin'."

"On the contrary—you *are* going," said the Captain, quietly.

"*Me* goin'? Oh, come, that won't do, considerin' a little matter as there is between us two."

The Captain looked him steadily in the face.

"I don't understand in the least what you mean, fellow!"

"Mean? Why, didn't you pay me to sham runaway?"——

“Indeed? What proof have you? You’ve been drinking, you scoundrel”—and then the Captain’s assumed calm gave way—“get out of this at once! Go along this moment—there are your wages. Here, Charles!—William!” he called to two stable-helps—“Turn this fellow out of the yard, bag and baggage!”

The two hangers-on, whom the coachman had often enough hectored over, no doubt, obeyed the Captain’s orders with alacrity. They fetched down the man’s box from his room over the stables, set it down in the road outside the gates, and firmly, but without violence, conducted him to it, and closed the gates behind him.

The fellow was completely bewildered. He had hoped to bully the Captain, and like a bully lost his head as well as heart when he was turned upon. He was silenced and crestfallen. His confidence deserted him, and he slunk away like a beaten cur.

The Captain breathed freely again. He told his wife that the coachman had been insolent, and that he had discharged him. “He’s a drunken disreputable scamp, my dear. If he calls and wants to see you, as perhaps he will, in hopes of getting you to give him another

trial, don't you see him," said the Captain; and Mrs. Elwin promised she would not, and so that incubus was got rid of, so the Captain confidently believed, for good and all.

But he had forgotten that there was such a thing as the penny post. Whitcomb, having recovered from his bewilderment, had meditated on his wrongs, and the means of avenging them. Finally, with some difficulty, and after many false starts and blots and blunders, he penned the following epistle:—

"Mrs. Elwin, mum,—The undersined have took the libbatty of informing you as you are beein deseaved by them that didn ort to, by wich I means in regard of a certing sirkumstens as took plaice at Briton, whereby your osses runn a way and was reskewed by them as shall be naimless wich it was along of that as they perswaded you to consent, the trooth beein as it wasn a run a way at tall but a reglar plant, munny down for to dew it havin been giv to me and another which by enkwirin for him in the naim of Tom Collins as is a yelp at the Livery Stabels where your osses stood at Briton will beer out what I sez on oth if rekwissit. Hopin as you will parden this libbatty and likewise in havin assissted to deseave you as is escusable in a pore man through the temptin awfer of Banker England noats.

"Your humbel servant JOHN WHITCUM."

"Mrs. Captin Elwin,

"Claytersville, Brixton."

This letter, duly signed and sealed—with the

impress of a thumb on red wax—was dropped into the post-office, and in due course delivered to Mrs. Elwin.

Her feelings on reading it I leave my readers to imagine!

CHAPTER VII.

EDITING "THE OBELISK."

OLD SCARDRAKE, as has been stated already, had a multiplicity of irons in the fire. He was something in the style of a Marine Store, or one of those mysterious all-sorts shops in a large village or small country town—shops that will even supply a second-hand coffin at times, as one did to my knowledge at C——, in S——shire, and thereby won a bet for a resident, who had wagered with a London visitor that he couldn't ask for anything at the village shop that it could not supply. The 'cute Londoner asked for a second-hand coffin, and it turned out that the enterprising shopkeeper actually had the article in stock. It had been made for "a gentleman deceased," of course; but his executors objected to the price, and it was returned on the undertaker's hands, who was glad enough to part with it at a reduction to the tradesman, who converted it, *pro tem.*, into

a cupboard, and kept spices and sugar-loaves in it.

I don't mean to say that, if you had asked Scardrake for a second-hand coffin you would have got it, for he did not keep a shop; but of the class of articles he dealt in you might have your choice. Those articles were "Securities." From a duchess's diamonds to a penny-gaff; from a house and grounds to a weekly publication of the kitchen-sensation order; from a post obit to a patent corkscrew; there was scarcely anything that Scardrake hadn't dealt in at one time or another.

He was a hard man was Scardrake; and while a creditor of his had anything convertible into money to satisfy him he never let go his hold. He was a man who, eating grapes, got all the sweet pulp, but did not part with the stones or skin. Skin! If he had done business with a flint, that flint would have had to leave his epidermis in old Scardrake's hands, to be by him converted into a something that fetched money.

It was reported of him indeed that once, failing in any other way to get a farthing out of a poor wretch, whom he had squeezed more dry than any grapeskin, he actually made the unhappy man's wife cut her splendid long hair off

her head, and carried it away in a brown paper parcel and sold it !

Why, if Scardrake had advanced one of his own pigs half a pailful of wash, if he could not have got repayment in any other way, he would have shaved that hog, and hoped for a rise in bristles—he would indeed !

You see in that big web of his there were so many flies struggling, that when any security in the form of a speculation fell in, he was almost always able to find, somewhere in a corner of his toils, a man who could be of use—*cheap*—in keeping it going, or making it go !

Among the numerous securities that had passed through old Scardrake's hands there chanced to be a magazine.

That magazine was called *The Obelisk*. It had once upon a time been a good and successful periodical, but times had changed. Cheap magazines spread, and the proprietors of *The Obelisk* in a moment of weakness reduced its price. They, of course, reduced its price without changing their policy, and consequently those deluded members of the Shilling-Magazine-Public who were tempted by the novelty to buy it, found themselves gasping in a much higher class of literature than they expected—or wished.

The result was that the magazine changed hands. It passed first into the possession of a speculative swindler, who dressed like a Methodist parson and talked like a Mæcenas. He carried it on for some time with great success—that is, so long as he could get all his work done for nothing. Then he went through the Bankruptcy Court, or did that worse bit of roguery—a composition deed. Long before any of his hapless dupes had received a penny from the inspectors, he had recouped himself, and had established a large business. He used to speak quite affectingly of his struggles to make *The Obelisk* a success, and was fond of remarking that he "had fought the ship to the last." He omitted to add that he had at the supreme moment picked the pockets of the crew and swum ashore.

From his hands, or rather those of the inspectors under the deed, the magazine passed into the hands of a company. It was a limited liability company, and there is therefore no need to linger over its career at this time. It was bought by a Scotchman, who was such a smart fellow that, as every one said, he would never have bought it if he thought he would have to pay for it. It is my private impression that he was not very far out in his calculation.

In his small way he carried it on after the fashion of the other rogue. He paid as few people as he could, and sacked every shilling it produced. But he was not so plausible a rogue as the other. He had an unfortunate habit—due to Scotch whisky, or some other intemperance—of breaking out into arrogance, and this led in a way to his becoming suspect. At any rate, it got to be a habit among his contributors to go into his office with a long arm, and a short one—the latter holding the “copy,” the other extended for coin!

Nemesis eventually landed the North Briton in Whitecross Street. After trusting to Providence and the small boy in the office to bring out the magazine between them for a couple of months, he felt compelled to sell it. He sold it—so the whisper goes—for ten pounds to a lot of rising geniuses, who, finding other magazines closed against them by the jealousy of editors, determined to have one of their own. They had no capital, but they felt that the first number of *The Obelisk* published under their auspices would electrify the world, and command an immense and immediate circulation.

Unluckily, somehow, the electrifying of the world did not come off as expected. The printer and the paper-maker had to take the

magazine — the only security the galaxy of genius could offer. The galaxy of genius was, however, still employed, pending other arrangements, and it got so elated by this unexpected success, that it began to see that "it was only a question of time. The magazine would go, with capital behind it!" So the geniuses got exorbitant in their demands, and when the proprietors objected, threatened to throw the whole thing overboard, and leave the magazine to shift for itself.

To cut a long story short, the printer took the paper-maker's share at a song, and being one of old Scardrake's clients, offered it to him as a security for a loan. When the printer went to smash, it was the only thing with which old Scardrake emerged from the ruins.

He at once set himself to righting the craft. He had done that kind of thing often before, and had no doubt of his ability to bring it safely into port.

He could work it cheaply, as I have said, because he knew where to lay his hand on men able to work it, and under such obligations to him that they would work it. Then again, to give the devil his due, there was in the eyes of his victims one great point in Scardrake's character. He did not pay well, but his money

was certain, and it was paid without fail at the fixed date of settlement. It is astonishing how far this punctuality covered a multitude of shortcomings. "Old Scardrake is a rogue, a liar, a swindler, a robber, a murderer—but he pays on the day he names; and though the pay is not much, it's certain." Such was the character he got at the theatres as well as publishing-offices; and it stood him in good stead. It is humiliating to think in how many cases that one knows, this one small virtue of punctual payment is allowed to balance a host of drawbacks! "Snuffle, Wyne, and Goodygoody are a firm of pious rogues, and are sure, if you have dealings with them, to rob you under cover of a leaf of Scripture; but then your cheque is there as safe as the bank every"—Wednesday or Saturday, or whatever their pay-day is!

Little Mettler, on the other hand, who is as honest as the day, and supports a lot of poor relations, has hard work at times to conduct his business to a prosperous issue, and his pay-days have a way of getting put off from week to week. "Oh, yes, M.'s a good little chap, and as honest as the day; but there is a little difficulty in getting your money sometimes!" Oh, splendid virtue of pecuniary punctuality, for

how many drawbacks do you not atone ! We laugh at the epitaph on the lady who was " bland, passionate, and deeply religious, who was a relation of the Earl of Cork, and painted in water-colours—and of such is the Kingdom of Heaven ! " Should we see so very much to laugh at if it ran—" He was well known in business for punctual cash payments on the appointed days of settlement—and of such is the Kingdom of Heaven ? " I don't think it would seem as comic, so fully are we impressed with the high merit and lofty virtue which are included in that brief summary. Not that I would be understood for a moment to be deprecating punctuality in money matters, a truly excellent practice—all I protest against is, its being looked upon as the greatest of the commercial graces. However, to return to my black sheep. Scardrake set himself diligently to getting the derelict magazine into sailing trim, in order that he might work her into port and sell her.

Now, among the numerous clients upon Scardrake's books, there chanced to be our friend of *The Cockcrow*—old Heginbotham. He was not a client upon whom our usurer was likely to fatten ; for, as he used to say jocularly to his creditors, " You can't get the vital fluid out of

a geological specimen"—in short, blood out of a stone. But he was useful to Scardrake, nevertheless, who did not mind lending him a trifle at times, in the full assurance that it would be not repaid, but worked out.

There never was such a fellow as Heginbotham for slipping into his articles little dexterous allusions—not puffs—to call them so would be coarse—but zephyrs of popularity. Whatever subject you gave him to write upon—however difficult its connection with the article to be mentioned—Heginbotham would manage it, and with an ease and dexterity truly remarkable. There does not, for instance, appear at first sight to be any connection between the First Lord of the Treasury and horehound candy, but old Heginbotham would find one. "The Premier, who sways that incongruous assembly, the House of Commons, perhaps less by the force of a gigantic intellect than by that peculiarly suasive eloquence of a voice, whose deep and ringing tones could scarcely be improved by Sniggleson's Never-cough-again Candy, is about," etc., etc. Or if it were a bit of descriptive reporting, it was just the same: "The weather was all that could be wished, and the whole scope of the magnificent area in the centre of which the

review was to take place was clearly discernible. The distant hills stood out sharp and clear as one of Mr. Blank's photographs, and the whole scene was invested with a wealth of summer that made one forget for a while this variable climate of ours, which one week drives us to punkas and puggrees, and the next compels us to the consumption of Sniggleson's Never-cough-again Candy."

Such a man was, of course, immensely useful to one who, like Scardrake, had so many irons constantly in the fire. Heginbotham was for ever taking one of those irons out, and blowing on it; for he knew that on his doing so depended the next loan he might chance to need from Scardrake. It was quite an understood bargain between them, and there was no shyness or reserve as to its nature—for if Scardrake wanted a puff, he wrote to our friend and said so; and if Heginbotham wanted a loan, he asked for it, enclosing the last puff he had done.

The first thing Scardrake did on getting hold of *The Obelisk* was to ask Heginbotham to call on him to advise him about it.

"What had you better do with it?" said Heginbotham, when he heard from Scardrake how he had become possessed of the magazine.

"Why, I'll tell you—give me a thousand a year to edit it—that's about it."

At this, which was merely a facetious suggestion, old Scardrake laughed—and so did Heginbotham. The former knew his man too well to contemplate any such step, and the latter was quite aware of it. Admirable as a private soldier, Heginbotham had none of the qualities that go to make up an officer. As a journalist, with an editor to direct him, he was as good a workman as you could wish to meet with. Entrusted with the command, he was worse than useless.

Scardrake knew this by experience, so he let Heginbotham have his joke; and then having declined to make him the editor of *The Obelisk*, promised to have him on the staff, and asked him to name a man fit to manage it.

"I don't want one of your swell-writers, who'll insist on having his name on the wrapper; and, when my money has pulled the thing through, take all the credit of it, and say he established it. I want some one cheap and useful—a chap that won't show off any airs and graces, but will do as he's told, and ask no questions."

"You want a camel, in fact, guaranteed not to break his back under the last straw. Well,

I think I can name one or two. I know one fellow by the way, who is really a clever chap, and could do the business well—but I think he has a spirit of his own—otherwise"—

"Curse his spirit," said Scardrake cordially; "I'll knock that out of him. Chaps that eat my bread must not have proud stomachs. That's just like your precious scribbling fellows—they can't pay their tradesmen's bills, but they're so cursed stuck-up that they look down upon gentlemen who can pay twenty shillings in the pound, and whose money they're glad to take."

"Yes. We have had that argument out before, Scardrake," said Heginbotham, laughing, "and I'm not going into the discussion again. Only there *are* two sides to a bargain, and if they take your money, they do the work that you can't, for all your twenty shillings in the pound. As for being in debt, you have never had the privilege of knowing its delights. Hang it, sir, it's a blessing—that's what it is. Look at us two:—here are you with your twenty shillings in the pound, and if you were to die to-morrow nobody would regret you—hang me if they would—and your heir-at-law would be glad of the riddance. Now look at me:—supposing I'm called to the happy hunting grounds

to-morrow, I know I shall leave behind me a mourning butcher and baker, and an inconsolable laundress ! ”

“ *She* wouldn’t have much cause to cry,” said Scardrake, with a delicate allusion to the scanty quantity and doubtful quality of the linen that Heginbotham displayed.

“ Oh, you don’t suppose I was going to venture here in a clean shirt—Gad ! I wouldn’t do it if I was a flint, for fear I should excite your cupidity and get skinned alive.”

“ Oh, your skin’s safe enough now ; since they have found a substitute for ass’s skin for writing-tablets, it wouldn’t pay for the flaying. But come—no more larking—what’s this chap’s name ? ”

“ Oldham—he’s on our paper, but he has worked for the magazines and has served his apprenticeship to the business. He’s a steady hand, too, and clever—but as I warned you he’s got a spirit, and he might kick at some things he would be expected to do on *The Obelisk*. But he is out and away the best man for the place ; and as to those subjects which might breed a row, it would be easy enough to avoid talking about ’em to him. You can do them, and leave him to find ’em out, if he is sharp enough. There’s always a way of

managing these matters, and if Mr. Elias Scardrake doesn't know it, I shall be astonished muchly ! ”

“ Well, I'll write, and ask him to call on me.”

“ I can tell him at the office to-night, if you like.”

“ Very well, and tell him to look in to-morrow.”

Heginbotham saw Lancelot in the evening, told him that Scardrake wished to see him, and explained his object in so doing.

“ He asked me if I knew any one who could edit *The Obelisk*, and I named you,” said Heginbotham, not at all unwilling to let Oldham see that he was indebted to him for the offer. Heginbotham's candle did not suffer much obscurity from a bushel. To doing good by stealth and blushing to find it fame, he preferred doing good rather ostentatiously, and borrowing a little money on the strength of it. He entered up his charges against Oldham in his memory, with the intention of claiming payment when next he was in want of a little ready cash.

Lancelot Oldham was delighted enough ! He had been scheming and planning, and now here was something coming to his help unsought.

He felt strongly inclined to dance a fling in honour of the event, in spite of Heginbotham's assurance that the proprietor of *The Obelisk* was the biggest scoundrel unhung, and was certain to rob and cheat him.

To do him justice, Heginbotham advised Lancelot for the best, told him what salary to ask, and how much to accept as a minimum, it being a moral certainty that Scardrake would try to beat him down.

The next morning found Lancelot at old Scardrake's chambers. Scardrake was civil and smooth enough—as he always was until he had got his victim safe. The boa-constrictor, as Natural History tells us, always slavers his prey before swallowing it.

“Our friend Heginbotham, Mr. Oldham, has told me that he thinks you would be willing to undertake the management of *The Obelisk*. What do you say?”

“I shall be happy to do my best to conduct it.”

“I can't afford to spend much money on it, you must know. The fact is, I have lost a good deal by it already, having taken it in discharge of a bad debt. If you can work it cheap the thing's settled. What are your terms? I like to be straightforward and business-like in these matters.”

Lancelot named his sum. Scardrake pursed up his mouth and wagged his head.

"Come, come! Be reasonable, Mr. Oldham. I can't give as much as that. I was thinking about half that sum."

Lancelot, duly posted up by Heginbotham, declared it was utterly impossible to do the work at the price named by Scardrake. But he was not unwilling to knock fifty pounds off the salary he had named, and, after a little more chaffering, the affair was settled.

"By the way, Mr. Oldham," said Scardrake, "there's one thing I want to reserve. I have dealings with lots of people—tip-top swells, some of 'em—and when they know I have the magazine they'll want to write for it sometimes. They always do. Well, you see, I wish to oblige them, and it will push the magazine too; so I want to reserve the right to insert an occasional paper—of course, you will have the supervision all the same."

Lancelot did not quite like this, but he reflected that he could always throw up the appointment if Scardrake tried to exert his privilege to the detriment of the magazine, or the discredit of the editor.

So the bargain was struck, and the next week found Lancelot at *The Obelisk* office hard

at work, getting the next number together. A new series was announced, with splendid illustrations, "the new proprietors being determined to carry on this old-established magazine in a manner fully worthy of its world-wide renown."

Lancelot had his work to do to get a good staff together at such a short notice; but he exerted himself to the utmost, and pulled through.

Of course he had to undergo the ordeal through which every young editor has to pass. He received that well-known MS., which has gone the round of all the magazines and been declined, until its outside sheet is grimy with being much handled, and marked with queer little hieroglyphics by the various editors who have refused it. Then there was the Irish gentleman who wished to see the editor, and made him understand that he (the Irish gentleman), was the most talented writer in London, and capable of discoursing eloquently and learnedly on any subject from Spectrum Analysis or the Darwinian Theory down to the question, "What shall we do with our cabs?" Then there was the almost illegible and utterly ungrammatical story, full of twaddle and sentiment, sent by the lady who had three small children to support, and hoped to get a living by her pen.

Then he had an attack of that curiosity of literature, the disappointed would-be contributor who takes to writing abusive anonymous letters; and last, not least, there was the lunatic, who sent in his utterly incomprehensible contributions, scrawled and scribbled over all sorts of odds and ends—brown paper bags, bits of old wall paper, and even an old linen collar.

Lancelot was worried, of course, especially by the distressed lady, whose ambitious pen was not to be bought off by the forwarding of ten shillings-worth of postage stamps out of his scant salary. However, he contrived to get through the work, and to have a very good first number ready in time.

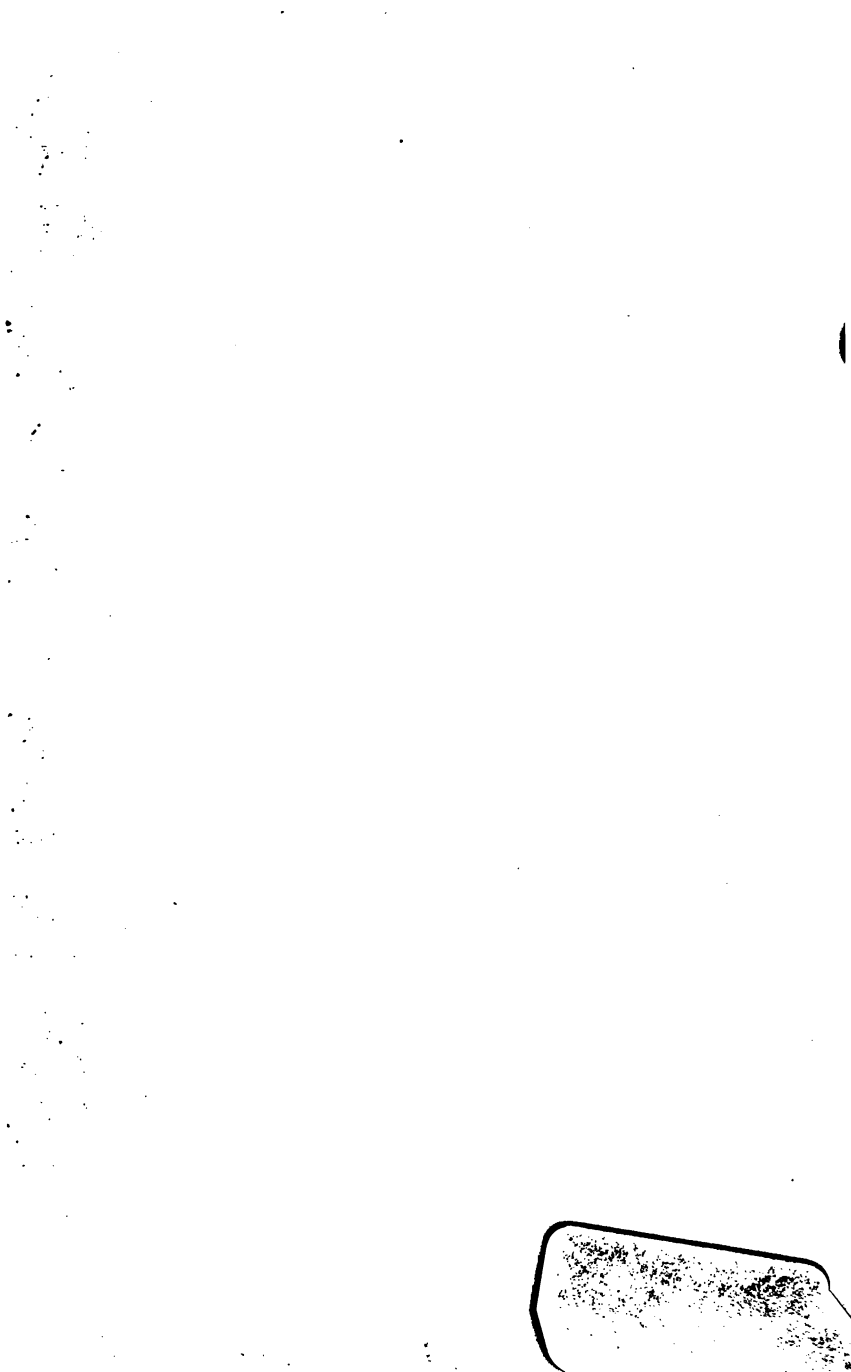
You may be sure the very first copy that came into the office was seized upon by Lancelot, who inscribed on it, "with the editor's compliments," folded it up in a wrapper, and directed it to—

"Miss Hassard,
17, The Grove,
South Lambeth."

The reviews said that the first number of the new series of *The Obelisk* was an exceptionally good first number, and prophesied a long and

prosperous career for it, if maintained at its present standard of excellence. This was speaking rather warmly in its favour; but, in the opinion of one person at The Grove, Lambeth, it was not half as laudatory a notice as *The Obelisk* deserved.

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